

An Urgent Call to Prayer

by Al Whittinghill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer in the church, highlighting the early church's example of prayer and the power of prayer in seeking God's face and purposes.

Duration: 55:27

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Joel 1:14, Matthew 18:20, Luke 11:9-10, John 14:13-14, Acts 1:14, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, James 5:16

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Urgency of Prayer", "Corporate Prayer"

Description

Al Whittinghill emphasizes the urgent need for prayer within the church, highlighting the significance of a Solemn Assembly as a time for believers to come together, set aside personal agendas, and seek God's heart for revival. He reflects on the early church's commitment to prayer and how it was the foundation for their growth and impact, urging the congregation to prioritize prayer as the essential work of the church. Whittinghill calls for a collective response to God's call, encouraging everyone to participate in prayer meetings and to recognize the power of corporate prayer in overcoming challenges and fulfilling God's purposes.

Transcript

Well, praise God for the sense of His wonderful presence in this place. And I've really missed you all, singing there with you and worshipping the Lord. I said it's a little bit like coming home.

So many faces that we know and love. I think I've now loved East Side Baptist Church for 25 years, and some of the faces are the same. We're all getting a little older, but it's a sweet thing.

And to look up in the choir and to see people still there worshipping, but there's a vibrancy that God is up to something here. And I'm really excited about what that is. And it's a joy to pray for you.

I thank you so much for the privilege of your attention this morning. And I'm glad to have some of my family here. We all are excited about what God's doing here.

Thank you also for, some of you don't know this, but our oldest daughter is getting married right here, March 15th. And we're excited about using good old East Side Sanctuary for that. Pray for me that I'll be able to make it through it.

I get choked up just thinking about it now. What am I going to do then? Pray for me, please. But we feel like a part of you.

So many memories and so much that God is doing. And as I talked to David about the privilege of coming here, he asked me to come this morning and originally tonight, but you know how that is tonight, what happened to the churches all across America tonight. I'll talk about that in a moment.

But I was excited because he told me about next Sunday night, the Solemn Assembly. And I said, well, do the people understand the privilege that they really have to have a Solemn Assembly? Do we understand? And I don't think it's been talked about that much. So my assignment and privilege was to kind of prepare our hearts for that time.

Because you see, not many people find that word very exciting, Solemn Assembly. I mean, we're solemn about enough things. I mean, about the economy, about world terrorism, about troubles that come on us on every side.

I don't come to church to be solemn. I come to praise the Lord, right? And to thank him. And, but there is that song that we sang just now that says, Lord, beyond you call me higher, far beyond all my wildest dreams, all to Jesus, I surrender all to him.

I freely give the beauty of the Lord seeking his face abounding grace for me. And then we sang this at the end, light the fire that once burned bright and clear and replace or restore the light or lamp of my first love that burns with holy fear. That's reverence in all.

And when we look around and see what is going on in our world, and we consider the disregard for the things of God and the state of so many churches across our land, that really is an emergency situation. And we consider the heart of our heavenly father, then we have to be moved. And a solemn assembly is when the people of God are concerned for the heart of God and the plan of God.

And they put their own agendas aside, regardless of whatever it is. Even honeymooners, it says in Joel, come together to pray. It's like the Brooklyn Tabernacle says about their prayer meeting.

They say, if you have to miss Sunday morning, that's one thing, it's okay. If you have to miss Sunday night, well, not good, but go ahead. But no matter what, don't miss prayer meeting unless you're in the hospital or dead.

It's the absolute priority for them. And I would pray that the purpose of this morning would be to populate that Sunday night meeting next week, a solemn assembly where this body comes together and seeks the heart and face of God for true revival, true blessing, true outpouring of his Holy Spirit. You see, we've got to have heaven sent revival, not just for survival, although that is part of it, but for the glory and honor of God that is really being challenged by impudence on every side today across the world.

The enemy is getting very cheeky about the whole thing. And it's time for the church to become what the Lord wants her to be. True revival will come, not by simply becoming aware of our need of it.

Sure, we may study history and see our need of revival, and everybody in here might agree on that, but revival won't come that way. It won't come if some preacher is successful in scaring the daylights out of you about all our sins and about all the problems. That won't bring revival, but we need a good dose of that.

But it still won't bring revival. It won't even come through wonderful music like Doug and the choir just let us in. We feel exhilarated, but that won't bring revival.

Revival will only come as we have a revelation afresh from the Spirit of God as to who he is and what his purposes are. Beyond my wildest dreams, all that he has in and through this body, this body that has a destiny that God has, not just what we think it should be, our church, but rather what God says. And the people must recover that.

And then once we see that, you see, something is required of us as we're going to see is required of those early believers. The people of God must choose to respond. They must choose beyond their own preferences and beyond their own conveniences and beyond even their own safety and allow the Lord to have everything, all to Jesus I surrender.

It's so easy to sing it in this context together here, but I want to just get your mind to thinking about your wildest dreams and God can go beyond that. What would it be like if God had his way with this church? What would it really be like if the Lord Jesus Christ was given full sway in your life and in mine, not just as individuals, but together with one heart, one mouth, one soul to really lay hold of his purposes? Well, I want to pray and then I want you to turn to Acts chapter 1. I want to look at that early church and I want to see some things about prayer and the place of it in the body of Christ. And I unashamedly tell you my goal is to stir you so that you will, no matter what else is planned, it's humanly possible to be at the Solemn Assembly next Sunday night.

And even if you don't know how to come saying, Lord, teach me about it. Let's just pray. Father, we look to you now and we are helpless without you.

We can do nothing. We know that you have wonderful thoughts toward us. You are for us.

You're not against us. The people of God bought with your own blood. Would you this morning open our hearts to your spirit's still small utterance and may we not be able to defend ourselves against your stirring.

May we be brought to the tip of your precious majestic loving sword and may all that is not of you perish and may what is of you flourish and come forth in the beauty of holiness. Bless this dear church, Lord, and may what you say to people today, may they be dating of things from what your spirit says even this morning. In the name of Jesus, we confess our helplessness.

We're looking to you, Lord, except you speak. It's all vanity. Just speak, Lord, for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

Father, we ask it in Christ's name. Amen. Well, even after the great commission was ringing in the hearts of his disciples who were so excited, they couldn't believe for joy, just like when we sang a while ago, he's alive.

You should have seen your faces. You were fired up and that's good. And he back from the dead, he says, go ye into all the world and make disciples, teach them to observe all the things that I've said to you.

It's like your church purpose statement to build up passionate disciples, not just theoretical knowers, but passionate disciples for the glory of God. And even with this knowledge of what God wanted and even encouraged by the resurrection, the Lord Jesus charged them as if to say, even though you know that I'm

alive and all power is given to me in heaven and earth and you know what I want you to do and you're stirred by it. Go into Jerusalem and do not depart from there.

He told him to be about waiting on him. And that meant to them seeking his face as, as we'll see. And, and don't leave Jerusalem until you be endued in incarnately filled with the power of God and that you become witnesses, living sacrifices for me.

And so 500 people received that exhortation from the risen Lord and must've been Superbowl Sunday because only 120, I didn't mean to say that there, but, but only 120 of the 500 showed up because you see, their priorities were not yet sanctified. Well, and so that 120 went into the upper room. The, the book of Acts starts with the ascension.

The Lord Jesus went into heaven and then they went to Jerusalem. It says in the last verse of Luke and we're in the temple daily praising God and rejoicing at it. But some of those people obeyed, not because they wanted to, not because they didn't have anything else to do, not because they didn't have pressing schedules, but because they loved Jesus.

They said, we're going to be available. We're going to do what he said. And they came to Jerusalem.

And let's just read what Luke says about in Luke Acts chapter one. I'll get there with my mind in a moment. Friends, just thank you for putting up with my stammering.

The former treatise I have made O Theophilus of all that Jesus began to do and teach. Luke is saying my gospel. I wrote to you of what Jesus began to do and teach.

That means while he was here on earth as the Lord of all walking among the people until the day in which he was taken up. And after that, through the Holy Ghost, he gave commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen. He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem and to love one another and to stay together.

And by this, the world will know that you're my disciples. By the agape, you have one for another. And so you see the Luke's gospel was what Jesus began to do.

But after he ascended into heaven, listen to what the last verse of Mark's gospel says. The last two verses. So then after the Lord had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven and he set on the right hand of God.

See, that's what we call the session or the Lordship of Christ. He is the Lord of all crowned with glory and honor. And because he is alive and all authorities given to him, they went forth and they preached everywhere the Lord working with them.

I love that phrase. The risen Lord on the throne working with them, co-laborers with the risen Christ, confirming the Lord, confirm with signs and with wonders. And so you see in the book of Luke the things that Jesus began to do.

But you see from the throne of the universe as Lord of all in the book of Acts, the things that the Lord Jesus continues to do. Doing from the throne as Lord of all. And he's still doing things, you know.

We sang about it today. He is Lord of all. And so even after the Great Commission, they were waiting upon him.

And so you read of it in Acts chapter one when it says a little later, it says in verse 14, all of these continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus and with his brothers. See, that early church, you see in the book of Acts, what they did without any buildings, without any constitution, church constitution, without publicity, without the media, no trained leadership. In fact, the world said they were ignorant and unlearned men.

No finances to speak of silver and gold. Have I none? No political involvement except to go to jail. And no business interests except for stocks and bonds.

But they didn't own them. They wore them in prison while they were there. And they turned the world upside down, witnessing to the resurrection, the Lord working through them and in them because he is alive.

And so with the ascension, you see in verses nine of Acts one, when the Lord Jesus had spoken these things while they beheld, he was taken up and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven and went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel. And he says, you men of Galilee, why are you standing, gazing up to heaven? It's almost like the Lord said, why are you sitting there? Just praising me, going off into heaven.

Do what he said. This same Jesus, which has taken up from you into heaven will come again in the same manner as you've seen him go into heaven. But until he comes, Jesus says, occupy and be about the father's business.

He says to his own in that last utterance he gave in the upper room, greater things than I've done, you will do also because I'm going to the father. Because I live, you shall live also. And greater will my presence be in you than the presence of the world around you.

You can overcome, you can do all these things. You will do it by the life of Christ that is in you. So they didn't have all the stuff we put confidence in today.

All they had was the word of God, the spirit of God, and prayer. Now, the word of God never changes. It's given from God.

It's a stable, glorious truth. And the spirit of God, the living person, the deity of the spirit of God, he will never change. I'm the Lord, I change not.

So the only variable in that whole equation is prayer. And you see, that is the only equation really. Now, we can read the word and respond.

We can submit to the spirit. But prayer is different in that it's a response of all to Jesus. I surrender, and I'm going to be available.

He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but wait until God answered. See, God designed it from the very beginning, that the church that he loves and died for rises or falls on her praying. It doesn't mean you can't have outward success.

It doesn't mean it's not possible to live a very active, busy life. The average church today thinks that the keys of the church are preaching. Preaching is vital.

I'm not minimizing it. Or maybe giving or provisions or programs that we come up with, purpose-driven programs or something, you see. But you see, that is not the case.

Everything the church does on that level depends on prayer. Prayer is the great important thing. It's possible to be active for him and not occupied with him.

It's possible to be a form of godliness and have no real sense of being connected to him and living in the power of who he is. And so Paul would pray for the Ephesian church that the eyes of their heart would be opened, that they would see what is the incredible riches of Christ in you and the possibilities of him being alive, his calling as high priest, and the great power that he's made available to the church, his body as he sheds forth this divine energy in us, the fullness of him who fills all and in all. Koinonia was what he had in mind.

It means to be stirred and to have in common. And so you see those believers I just read. It wasn't just mature believers.

It was new believers. You had Mary who'd been there a while. She had believed for a while.

But his brothers, all four of them were there. It says he's the brethren of the Lord. They didn't even believe on him while he was on earth, according to John 7. But the resurrection encounter convinced them.

And so you have young believers, old believers. You have political people like Matthew who'd been a tax collector. You have Simeon who tried to tear down the government.

You have people that were different political persuasions. You have young and you have old and you have men and you have women. But what were they doing together for 10 days? Can you imagine being in a prayer meeting for 10 days? What were they doing? Well, when the Holy Spirit fell on them and then Peter stood and said, this is that that was prophesied by the prophet Joel.

What you see happening here is in fulfillment to what God said and promised in Joel. What did God promise? You see, 12 times in the Old Testament, what we would call revival happened. God swept in by His Spirit.

It's so similar to the revivals throughout history. When God sweeps in and rescues a people of his own ready to perish with sin and societal pressure, he changes them. Well, 12 times in the Old Testament when he does that, it's because they had a solemn assembly.

They met together, not so they could get their needs met. They put all that aside, their own cares. And they said, Lord, we want your needs in the church to be answered.

We want your desires to be answered. What were they doing in that upper room? Well, they must have read Joel if they had the fulfillment of it. Listen to what it says in Joel 1, verse 14.

Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly. That's what you're doing.

Gather the elders and the inhabitants of the land into the house. Cry to the Lord. Alas, for the day, the day of the Lord is at hand.

Can you sense the clouds forming on every side around this country and others that trouble is brewing? Can you sense that? Let's not be blind optimists. Let's be optimists, but let's don't be blind ones. God can

do it, but it's not going to be without our response in real prayer.

It's not going to happen. And so we see them, chapter 2, verse 15. Blow the trumpet in Zion.

That was for warning. That was for warfare. That was for assembly.

In other words, get their attention. We need to go up and blow the trumpet in some people's ear to wake them up. And they say, how offensive.

You woke me up. I was having a nap. Well, they wouldn't have think that if the army was coming.

They would be, thank you so much for waking me up. Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly.

Gather the people. Sanctify the congregation. Assemble the elders.

And then it talks about getting nursing children and others together. The bride and bridegroom come out of the closet, come together. It's the number one priority.

Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord weep. It means wail between the porch and the altar and cry out to God. Oh God, your church, spare your people.

Give not your heritage to reproach that the heathen would rule over them. Don't let the church be under the heel of the world. Don't let them be under the sway of the world's schedule and all its desires.

But oh God, don't let them say, where is their God? And that is what the world is saying, looking at the church in America. Where is their God? Let me tell you something. If they, when they see the beauty of the Lord that relights the lamp of our first love and burns with holy fear together corporately.

And God is placed at the disposal of the church, the powers of the unseen world. To corporate prayer, he has promised. He says, everything I do is done through prayer.

My method is always a prayer method. And you see, you can count your failures or losses and your failure or loss in prayer. You have not because you ask not.

I've done all these things. He says, I want to give you. Well, it's like the New Testament when it says.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Be afflicted more. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness.

Seek the face of God. It's saying there because he's jealous. He wants fellowship with that which he's bought and that which he loves.

He died not just take you to heaven, but to put heaven and the Lord Jesus in you. Called into the fellowship of his son to co-labor the Lord Jesus working in us. That's the only reason he'd leave us on earth.

If all he did was just to make us happy, he'd have drowned us at baptism. I mean, seriously, because to be with Christ is far better. He has a glorious purpose for you and for me in the midst of the most difficult circumstances.

But if we'll take our eyes off those circumstances, you see, by the time in Acts chapter one that they have this awesome continual, they continued steadfastly in prayer and in supplication. And then at nine o'clock in the morning on the day of Pentecost, there was a great sound of God, a sense of his mighty majestic presence coming in. And it stirred them so much joy came, but power came and it made a commotion in all of Jerusalem.

So that 3000 were saved, as you know, and and Peter stands up to preach. And it's an amazing thing. And so as God's glory covered his people, every single member was involved.

There were no people that said, I'm sorry, I just don't have something else to do. It became their central spinal cord of purpose. Chapter two, verse 41, they that gladly received his words were baptized.

And the same day they were added to them 3000 souls. And they they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine. That's the truth that God gave his apostles, the fellowship being stirred together.

And in the breaking of bread, they ate together. They were together in fellowship and communion and in prayers. Those deep foundational truths and fear that we just sang about came upon every soul.

And many wonders and signs were done by the apostles and all that believed were together. And they had all things in common. And you see, in verse 46, they continued every day with one accord in the temple, breaking bread from house to house.

They ate their meat with gladness and a single heart. This one thing that Paul wrote about is what we want. We want this.

And so you see that they had all things in common. And they were all together in one accord. So much so that by the time Acts chapter three comes along, thousands of people were meeting for prayer every day at nine o'clock, at 12 o'clock and at three o'clock.

And you see in chapter three, verse one, Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer being the ninth hour. That's three o'clock in the afternoon. It was the time that the offerings had been offered before.

Pictures of Christ, which was to come. But the church would gather by the thousands and they continued steadfastly in prayer. What were they praying about? Was it just that God would send rain or something like that? They were praying about fellowship and about the lost and about the grace of God experienced in their life.

And so here you see Peter and John going to pray together. Keep in mind, they had fished together for years. They had prepared the Passover together.

They'd been to the tomb together. They had done all kinds of things together. Miracles.

They played golf together. No, they didn't do that. But they'd never prayed together.

It's possible to do all those things. Men's fellowship, come to a banquet and do all these things together. Go play golf.

I love the golf outing that we have here. It's a wonderful time of togetherness. But you can do all of that and never pray together.

And God wants this church and every other church that goes by his name to become a house of prayer. In fact, the devil just smiles at prayerless churches because he doesn't fear. He's not afraid of our budgets or our buildings or anything else we do.

But whenever the weakest, whoever that is in this room, if you'll get on your knees and take it seriously, this whole matter of prayer, the devil will start really shaking with fear because he knows that all of a sudden you're on God's ground, not the devil's ground, and he's already been defeated. If you'll get on your knees, they'll quit shaking. They'll quit shaking for looking at things, what's going on around.

Prayer opens everything. It says in the Bible, it opens the windows of heaven and the rains come. It opens the doors of utterance.

Paul prayed that they would pray for him to open a door, doorways to go through to preach the gospel. It opens the windows of heaven. It opens the doors of utterance.

It opens the hearts of men that are veiled and closed. It's not an information battle. It's a prayer battle.

That's what soul winning is. It's not just convincing, it's converting. And that comes through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's prayer opens the secrets of scripture. So it opens the heavens. It opens the world's doors.

It opens the hearts of men. It opens the scripture and makes it clear. It breaks down every barrier.

You see it breaking down the barrier in the book of Acts. It broke down the religion barrier. They prayed and the gospel was taken outside the Jewish to the Gentile.

It broke down the regional barrier. Come over and help us. He left Asia Minor and went to Europe.

It broke down the reason barrier. See, everything that hinders us from prayer, prayer will break. It'll prove itself to us if we'll just let him have his way.

Now, just because we have a solemn assembly does not mean that it will be solemn. We have plenty of assemblies to quote pray in our country. There are more prayer meetings now than almost anywhere you could ever.

I mean, there's so many people praying, but you see, it's what you do while you're assembling. And that's what they were doing in the book of Isaiah. God writes through Isaiah.

He says, listen to his people. I'm, I'm wearied with your solemn assemblies. You come before me and you make music and you lift your hands just like my people.

But when you lift your hands, they're full of blood. It's like the things in your life that caused the crucifixion. Of Jesus.

And so come, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they'll be white as snow. They'll be white as wool, but you've got to seek the face of God.

It's the equivalent of humble yourselves and pray and seek my face and turn from your wicked ways. And I will then hear from heaven. That's that great second chronicle.

714 has been a watchword for revival throughout all of history. Whenever God pours his spirit out in a land, you will trace it back to a kneeling group. A solemn assembly of people who said we're sick and tired of being sick and tired.

Now in the book of Acts, the church is called the assembly. The ecclesia, the assembly. In fact, there are some churches that won't even call themselves the church.

They say assembly because that's what the word ecclesia also means. Assembly because God wants us to be together. The word saint is not even in the singular.

Once in the New Testament, not once. That's shocking to me. Doesn't that shock you that God doesn't say he's a saint? No, it's always the saints because he sees us as together.

Corporately a body that he's head inhabits will, purpose and life and controls. So acts is the book of the church. It's really nothing more than a manifesto of answered prayer.

That's what it is. 120 people got serious like Jesus commanded them to and got down and the Holy Spirit was poured out and 120 became 3,120 and then became 8,000 and then 10,000 and then leaders and it shook the then known world. And it wasn't because they were skillful or had buildings or budgets or anything else.

It was because Jesus was their Lord. And they had the windows of heaven open. You see, it's an awesome thing.

Now that's tremendous church growth. Now, I would just say this because I am a Southern Baptist and I want to just read you some things. I took off the North American Mission Board website because I think that it's easy for us to think we're something that we're not.

As a denomination, we can say we're fruitful and we may be a lot better than some of the other more struggling groups. I'm not making comparisons here today. But over the last 50 years, there's been a pretty much of a stable plateau for the Southern Baptists of how many people we baptize every year.

Probably, the average is about 385,000. It has been more. It has been less.

Recently, it's been less than that in the last several years. But baptism, I'm not equating with salvation because they say on this website that 40% of the people that are baptized probably are not really converted. But if you want to scale, it sure beats walking an aisle making a decision because at least the person who's baptized is professing that they've trusted Christ and they're willing to make an identification with Him.

So this is why in Muslim countries, when you're baptized, it's when the persecution really begins. You can go visit a church. You can do these other things.

But when you're baptized, they draw the line. And so with this 384,000 per year, the last several years been less. If you were to take the number of 16.5 million believers in 43,000 churches that we have, that is every year, the average would be one convert for every 45 people.

One convert for every 45 people. But you see, there are thousands, over 10,000 Southern Baptist churches that never baptize anybody any year. And very few, the average 82% of all churches baptized 12 people, 82%.

And almost 15,000 baptize no one. And so if you were to figure that out, the average is about 1.7 per month per congregation. So we have congregations of 5,000.

You have 5,000 on your membership, or at least you did, I think. But see, if you were to look at the list of the people that are baptized in America, in the Southern Baptist, the highest church around is 1,300, 1,300 a year. There's three of them or four of them in America.

Five of the top 50 are right here in the Atlanta area. I mean, huge mega churches and God is doing great things. But the overall state is that if you baptized over 300 people, you'll be in the top 100 churches of all the 43,000 of how many people you baptize.

In Georgia, despite 1,300 being baptized every year, only two churches or three churches, I forget which, baptized more than eight people that were over 60 years old. Let that grip you if you're over 60. And we're not reaching the people that are over 60 because... But yet we're spending more money on missions and programs than we've ever spent before.

And what is missing? Why is it not this kind of fruit here? I'll tell you, I believe it's what God's gonna... He's gonna get us to pray and show us what's been missing. You have not because you ask not. You have an opportunity to come together to something brand new, beyond your wildest dreams, to come together in a solemn assembly.

I'm so proud of this church. Whoever initiated besides the Lord on a human level listening to do something like that, I would urge you with all my being to take advantage. Young people take advantage.

Old people take advantage and come together and say, Lord, speak to us. When the Lord Jesus built his church, he built a praying congregation. He planted a prayer meeting.

That was the church. It wasn't something the church did. He planted a prayer meeting.

He made a praying congregation. I want you to say that. A praying congregation.

A praying congregation. All together in one place. Every member participated.

And it's not like this today. In fact, the prayer meeting is the stepchild in most churches. It's reserved for a few who don't have time to do anything else, it seems.

I remember when I was here for 10 months, we were constantly talking about prayer. And it was a struggle. And it's a struggle in every church because we don't prioritize.

But I tell you, the prayer meeting is the barometer of health in a real church. So the reason we're not seeing what the early church saw is the lack of prayer. We treat the prayer meeting as if it's optional.

It's not optional. It's voluntary. But it's not optional.

It's a command from the Lord. And so this church in the book of Acts is a model church. It is meant to stir us.

And it's meant to be like the tabernacle in heaven was a model for the one that Moses made. And God said, make it just like the original. And just like David saw by the Spirit, the true temple in heaven and told Solomon, make it just like the original.

It says it over and over. So when you build a church today, the Lord Jesus says, I will build my church. I will grow my church.

But you want to know how? Look at his model. Look at the pattern. Look at what they prioritize.

Their priority was prayer. You know what? I look around America today and I see even the biggest churches, most of them are intimidated by trying to have service tonight. We're intimidated by it because we know what? Nobody will show up.

And I'm not throwing rocks, but I'm saying this. When we prioritize a solemn assembly or prayer like we prioritize the Super Bowl tonight, then you will see the prayer meeting populated. And the people of God will begin to sense the movement of God.

And the world will begin to see the Lord turning the captivity of the things that hold us back, the visible restraints. And they will say the Lord has done great things for them. And we are glad about it.

The breath that the body must breathe, the body of Christ is the atmosphere of prayer. And he will breathe into us and on us and do many things. So they persisted together in prayer and in obedience to that.

And they did it for years, even in Acts chapter 12. You see, they had an all-night prayer meeting stretched out. It's a strong word.

When Peter was in prison and James had been killed, he was there in prison. And they were going to execute him in the morning. And he was sleeping.

Hey, if you were going to be executed in the morning, could you sleep? He was at peace. And the church was praying stretched out early. And the angel came and opened the door and took Peter out.

I'll tell you what. It may have been the angel that opened the door and God sent the angel. But it was prayer that fetched the angel.

These people were praying and Peter went and knocked on the door. And they couldn't even believe for joy. How could this be? Prayer will take you beyond anything you've ever asked or thought.

See, the prayer meeting is like a jet engine on a big plane. Without the jet, you're just sitting there on the runway. And you know where you're supposed to go.

And you know what you're supposed to do. But you can't get off the ground. It leaves you down and natural.

You see, God rules in His church through the prayer meeting. It's a real test of where we are. And our problem is not unanswered prayer.

Our problem is unoffered prayer. So just like the jet engine on the plane, so is prayer. Just like sandbags on a levee that stop back the waters of judgment.

So prayer. We put down the prayers of the church together corporately. Let us pray.

We put down that and God looks for someone, a group to stand in the gap and hold back the waters of judgment. But when there's no levee made in prayer, judgment sweeps through the land. It's just like a bridge that the Lord wants to send supplies from heaven where His will is being done to on earth where

His will is to be done.

That bridge of prayer. But without prayer, the bridge is out. And the devil's heart is to cut off your supply lines, to leave you fighting in the energy of the flesh and in the natural mind and in the and just the will of man.

But if we will pray, God will build the bridge. And like it says in Philippians 1, God supplying my need through your prayers, says Paul to the Philippian church. Prayers like the electric poles that used to be made of wood.

They're in the shape of a cross. I liked them then. And they would take those wires right into the town, hook up to the big machine without the electricity.

The machines just there. We've got such machinery in place and everything else. And God is waiting to turn the switch on in power.

When the power lines are stretched, when the bridge is built, when the levee is up, when the when the rope is pulled, it's like the rope you pull. We get the rope together and pull it. And this giant bell goes in heaven above.

It's awesome. Prayer sends the soul aloft like electricity, which for years no one knew about. But it was latent in everything around them.

Once discovered, it changed everything. Go anywhere on Earth today where there's not electricity and you'll see before and after. But today it's like that for prayer.

Without prayer, it's like that. It's like no, no power, no electricity. That mysterious power is missing and no one can conceive of what it would be like beyond what you ask or think.

Greater things than I have done will you do. Because I'm with the Father, whatever you ask in my name, I will do. Greater things is what Jeremiah said.

Call upon me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you've never seen. See, prayer is not just a good idea. It's God's plan.

It's his norm. It's without prayer, he will not. Without God, we cannot.

But without prayer, he will not. He will not do it. We're left having church in our own power.

The highest stewardship of all is the stewardship of prayer. You see, I don't have time to go into it, but in Acts chapter 4, after Peter is arrested and they're beaten and they come out and the Sanhedrin charge them, don't preach anymore in that name. They go back to their own.

All their own are together. They didn't call a special meeting. They're together and they come into the prayer meeting and they say, the world is threatening us.

It's getting serious about resisting the gospel. And with one accord, it says in Acts 4, the first record of the prayer, what they said in the New Testament. It is powerful.

Whenever you see it the first time, they lifted up their voice together and they said, oh, Lord, you who rule in the heavens, you made heaven and earth. Look at the threatenings of the world around us. And you

said in Psalm 2 that the kings of this world resist the gospel and it's Christ.

It's just like you said. Now, Lord, grant unto us power that we might with boldness make known your holy child. They didn't pray for deliverance.

They didn't pray for safety. They prayed for boldness to make known the resurrected Christ. And it says in Acts 4, verse 31, that when they had prayed or after they had prayed, that the place where they were assembled.

That's what you're doing next Sunday night. They were assembled. The place where they were assembled was shaken.

Prayer will shake everything you've known. It'll shake the visible. And it says they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Oh, what a wonderful thing when God pours out on the corporate body of Christ, the spirit and all are filled. And they spake the word of God, the corporate church of Christ with boldness, the manifestation of God. And, you know, it's really interesting to me after they had prayed like they'd been commanded.

It says great power was given to them and they made known the resurrection and great grace was upon them all up to this point, even though thousands have been saved. And you see wonderful things happening. I mean, they're rejoicing.

The word great is not even used. But after prayer, great, great. Because, you see, it brings you into the great realm.

It brings you into the exceedingly abundantly above realm. It brings you out of church as usual into church as God intended. That's what he wants.

So great grace upon them all. Chapter five, great fear came upon all the church. Reverence for God.

Chapter 5:14, great increase. Believers added daily. Evangelism began to multiply.

Chapter 6, it says great growth took place. Chapter 6, great wonders and miracles in public took place. Chapter 8, great persecution because the world won't put up with it when it knows it's really a threat of the church.

But then it says great joy, even in the midst of all this. Overcoming circumstances was the church's experience. Great, call upon me and I will answer you, Esau, and show you great and mighty things that you've never seen.

Things on the heart of God, the purpose, the destiny of the church. God is still wanting to write church history. Everybody's studying it, but few are making it.

But he wants to write it. And the ink he will use is corporate believing prayer. I believe it.

Sure, I may have a prayer life. You may have a prayer life. And we think so individualistically.

We think that we come to church as the church is just a place to get our needs met individually. We go home until the next time we come back together. And the devil has robbed us of our corporate identity and our destiny to be those who reign in life in prayer.

But it's a solemn thing getting back to where we need to be. And the devil does not want it. His priority is prayer too.

Did you know that? The devil's priority is prayer. He's against it. And he'll do... He doesn't care what you do in terms of how busy I am and how many countries I travel to.

If I'm prayerless, he's happy. I'm not a threat to him, you see. And you see him in Acts chapter 5 right after that great prayer.

He comes and he tells a lie to someone's heart. And Ananias and Sapphira, they gave their money and they just tried to act like they gave all their money to the church, but they only gave part of it. Now, I don't think God judged them because they didn't give all their money.

I think God judged them because they lied to the church. And they simply... Here was their sin. They simply wanted to be thought more spiritual than they really were willing to be.

Let me tell you, if that was done today, if God did the same thing, most of us would drop dead. But you see, that disunity, that lie in their hearts. Why hath Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, to lie to the church? Boom, out he went into the presence of God, gone.

And it says, great fear fell upon the whole congregation. I guess so. You wouldn't come to church if you thought that if you weren't real, God would kill you.

That's what really happened there. Great fear. So disunity, oh, that weapon of the devil to break up the unity, the one accordness of the church.

Six times in the book of Acts, it says, with one accord. That means in singleness of heart, they were together. And you see, every time they were together in one accord, missions open up, purpose opens up, all kinds of things open up.

So the devil wants to break up the one accord. He wants to get this committee fighting against that committee. And he wants to get this person being angry at that person.

So when you walk down the hall, it's praise the Lord, you know, like that. And where you don't see it, you look like everything's peaceful. But when you get down to pray, there's no unity.

But he failed. You see, God brought just the opposite. And so he tried the next weapon, not disunity, but distraction.

He let, as the widows and orphans multiplied, and the people of God began to say, we need to help these people. Pure religion, undefiled, is to help widows and orphans. Nothing better you can do on this planet than to help widows and orphans.

I'm all for it. But we're neglecting something. The good and the best is getting in the way of the eternal.

We've got to find someone called to this. We assign them to, we must give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word of God. That's God's order.

Before you go preach into all the world, go pray into all the world. Otherwise, the preaching won't work. Pray into all the world before you preach, because it's like the bowstring that shoots the arrow.

You see, that's what God wants. So you see, the distraction didn't work. Instead, they got people back to continual prayer.

So in Acts chapter 8, the devil tries another one. Paul comes along and throws everybody in a prayer meeting, gathered together into jail. Some are killed.

It's a great threat. I can't pray. We can't pray in school.

We can't pray here. We might go to jail. We see where the secular dictates terms and the circumstances say don't do that.

And we comply. But you see, God said he scattered the church and the gospel was preached everywhere. And it was great joy because of the Lord Jesus doing his work.

See, disunity, distraction and distress. These three things will keep you from that meeting next week. His tactics are no different now for us than they've always been.

But I mean, if you're like me, we all want to become prayer people, right? I mean, don't you really want to be a person of prayer? And we hope, even if we struggle, that there are people who are really praying. I hope somebody's praying somewhere because I know it's right. But the question is, am I a person of prayer? Am I willing to be inconvenienced to learn what's not natural? What is the gift from God? What is a stewardship? You see, it's seemingly busy lives.

It's not easy to give prayer its official place. God wants us to do it. However, well, I just want to ask you as we come to the end of this word, could it happen to us that we're busy doing good things and doing what looks like it feels good and it looks good and we're missing the real heavenly realm? Prayer sends the soul aloft.

I remember once climbing a mountain up in Washington. I think it was Mount Hood. We walked up the side and it was a cloudy day.

And we walked up and finally the clouds quit. We got so high. And as you looked at a little further, we saw a lookout and peeking up over the clouds was Mount Rainier and Mount Baker and Mount Hood we were on.

It was like these majestic mountain peaks up above the clouds. And that is when it was quickened to me again, that prayer sends the soul aloft. It'll put you in the heavenlies.

And you will see with the perspective as a church together. When y'all called your pastor, you see so many churches, they put out on the internet, we need a pastor. And this one church I know had 400 applications and it might have been some child molester.

Who knows? They don't have any clue as to who it is. And so they have 400 applications to go through. Y'all didn't do it that way.

You prayed. You had a group of people in this church that prayed and they met four hours a week and three of those hours were spent in prayer. Business was just on the side.

And so when the time came for you to have a pastor, God said, now that's what I'm talking about. And it's like a hot knife through cold butter. I mean, Brother David was sitting here and it was wonderful.

It was awesome. Now, don't stop with that. Let it be multiplied and go through every person.

Whether it be the weakest person or the strongest person, don't you let the devil talk you out of getting into a prayer that's significant. I'm telling you it's tough. The prayer meeting in this church is a good thing.

There's a prayer wall that needs to be filled. But don't you dare think that you're where the Lord wants you in prayer. The prayer meeting in this church has competition with so many other committees that meet at the same time.

I know that's unpopular to say. Change the committees, make it the priority to get together and pray and learn even though it feels awkward. You see, you can be busy serving the Lord like they were an axe, but deficient in prayer.

The prayerlessness, the prayerless person lives in one world. The prayerful person lives in two worlds. And the one above has precedence overall.

If we really believe in prayer, we will come to prayer meeting. Doesn't that make sense? Do you believe in prayer? If we really believe in prayer, we will populate the prayer meeting. If we don't believe in prayer, if it's not a priority, no matter what we say, our prayerlessness gives away our unbelief.

It does. We say, let's get prayer over with so we can get on with the real work. Friends, prayer is the real work.

Prayer is the winning blow. And everything you do after that is just picking up the spoils of Jesus' victory as he works through you and you find out that he's gone before you. I'm afraid this generation may have lost sight of prayer.

I'm sure that all of us need to be re-educated by the Lord as to the depth and beauty of real prayer. Prayerless, you see, we live and fight in the devil's territory and with man's carnal weapons. But if we'll take the weapon that's mighty through God to the tearing down of strongholds, God will put us on his ground.

Prayerful will take scriptural ground and you will find out that greater is he that's in the church corporate than he that is in us. So the powers of the unseen world have been placed at the disposal of prayer. And I just urge you to let God do a new thing.

It's just the first of the year. This is a new day for this church. Let God do a new thing.

Admit to him that we... I just said before the first service back in this... Laying on my face back in the pastor's study, I said, Lord, the truths of this message have eluded me. They've eluded me. I mean, they're out of my reach.

I mean, I'm going to get up there and people are going to think he's a hot shot in prayer. I'm struggling just like you. But we've got to be willing to be learners.

We've got to come together and we say, we don't know what to do and get before him and wait. It may take 10 days. They weren't disappointed, were they? We preach for 10 days and pray for 10 minutes and wonder why nothing happens.

They prayed for 10 days and preached for 10 minutes and 3,000 were saved because the Lord was in it. We must quit settling for what man can do, what man can build, what man can produce. And we must and we will be brought to this by the Lord.

Either we will do it by choice or his loving faithfulness will bring the church to her knees another way. There are awesome days ahead. No one knows what they really hold.

But every one of us can sense a rumor from the Lord. We know there's urgent days. Young people, it's easy to get scared when you look around and what's going on in the world.

The old folks wondering about, I mean, there's just fear on every side. But if you will bend your knees in prayer and really let the Lord teach you how to pray. You'll never be disappointed.

And the church of the Lord Jesus will finally become what he died to make her and lives to ensure that she will be and will come to receive her as a bride without blemish or spot. We're not like that now. We can do everything in the world to build ourselves up and tell ourselves.

But the statistics betray us. Even the best of us is far short of the glory of God. We need to get on our face.

And it begins with individuals saying, I want to be part of a whole laying hold of God again. Well, maybe you're here today and you don't know the Lord Jesus. And this has been far out from where you are.

We're going to have an invitation in a moment. And I want to invite you to come to receive the Lord today. There'll be people here to pray with you.

Tim and others will pray with you. Whatever it takes to help you find your way to the foot of that cross to trust on him that we sang about others of you. However, as this invitation is given, I want to urge you.

I haven't been here in a while. I don't know whether it's customary to respond to the invitation, but I want to urge you if the Holy Spirit has quickened your heart and you want to say to him, Lord, I say yes. I don't even know all that it means, but I want you to teach me to pray and I'm willing to be available.

Then you come during this invitation. Just have a business meeting with the faithful one and receive from him what you need to say yes. Yes, Lord, you come and just humble yourself.

You can go on back after you do, but just have committed to him, nail it down. I'll be there. Well, let's bow for prayer.

Stand, please. I thank you, Lord, that the New Testament says our sufficiency is of God. Who is sufficient for these things? Who can enter into your holy place? You say the one who's willing to be cleansed, to have clean hands and a heart that you've made clean.

You'll allow them to come in to be in your presence and there in your presence, tell me, command me what to do. You tell the church together to not forsake the assembling of ourselves together like some do, but rather provoke one another to faith and good works more every day, even as we see the day approaching around us. So today, may there be some serious and deep and solemn decisions made that there'll be a change in the way we approach things.

May prayer be first, our first choice and not our last chance. Lord Jesus, have your way. Would you populate this meeting next week, this solemn assembly, and may it be that which brings your great heart

joy and is genuine for the glory of your name.

Now, for that one in here that needs to receive you today, would you give them the grace to run to you, Lord, and trust you. We've decided to follow you today, Lord. May we act on what we've heard and obey what we know to be truth.

And we pray it in Jesus name. Amen.

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