

# A Manual for Prayer - Part 2

by William MacDonald

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*The power of prayer is demonstrated in the book of Acts, where believers prayed for various needs and experienced God's answers, resulting in changed lives, answered needs, and increased faith.*

**Duration:** 1:31:28

**Scripture:** Acts 2:42, Acts 4:24, Acts 6:3, Acts 13:3, Hebrews 2:3

**Topics:** "Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, Mr. MacDonald reflects on the early Christians and their cultivation of a godly life, which resulted in tremendous messages and effective impact. He shares a conversation with a young man who chose to give up his comfortable life in the United States to serve God overseas. The young man explains that living a life of faith in the US is challenging, but when one puts themselves in a position of complete trust in God, there is a power that manifests in their life. MacDonald then highlights the story of Paul and Silas in jail, where they demonstrated prayer and praise, leading to an earthquake and the conversion of the jailer.

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## Transcript

Sound Words Tape Ministry, Queensland. This is cassette number two in the study series with Mr. MacDonald in the subject of prayer taken from the Book of Acts. It begins with chapter six of the Book of Acts.

Mr. MacDonald. But then we turn over to chapter six and we find prayer for the choice of deacons. Chapter six, and this is beautiful too.

Some lovely touches here. Let's begin back in verse one. In those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

These were all people of... These were all believers. Some of the Grecian or Hellenistic background and others of Hebrew background, all Jewish converts. Then the twelve called a multitude of the disciples unto them and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over the business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to

the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochurus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles.

And when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. Here was one of the first instances of difficulty in the early church. The Hellenistic converts were complaining against the Hebrew converts.

They thought their widows were being neglected in the daily ministrations. What do you do in a case like this? This is a big problem today. The problem is always the personal problem.

Interpersonal relationships. Prayer is sufficient. They get down on their knees.

They prayed. They selected men to carry on. They selected what we would call deacons.

Did God answer that prayer? Notice verse 7. And the word of God increased, and the multitude of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. Isn't that wonderful? You have prayer in the book of Acts, and then you read the next verses, and things start to happen. Hudson Taylor once said, and beautifully said, learn to move man through God by prayer.

Learn to move man through God by prayer. That's what these people knew. In the book of Acts, you see them praying.

You see things click. You see the gears mesh. You see the work of God moving forward.

The word of God increased. The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And I can just imagine the thrill, the path that rippled through that Christian company, just to think that some of the priests in Jerusalem were becoming obedient to the faith.

Praise God. What a book this is, the book of Acts. Then chapter 7, you have the wonderful story of Stephen, first martyr of the Christian church.

How did Stephen die? He died praying. He died praying for his guilty murderers. That's the way he died.

Acts chapter 7, verse 54. We'll begin. Prayer of the first martyr.

Acts 7, verse 54. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

Then they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and ran upon Him with one accord and cast Him out of the city and stoned Him. And the witnesses laid down the clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God and saying, that is, Stephen as he was calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Wonderful, isn't it? Here's a man expiring for Jesus Christ.

He's going to lay down his life for the namesake of the Lord Jesus. And before he passes off this scene, he just wants time to pray. And he says, Lord, don't lay this sin to their charge.

You know, it's a beautiful touch there. How did the Lord Jesus die? He died praying, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Stephen had been occupied with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Stephen had been gazing upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know, when you gaze on Christ, you're changed by beholding. Stephen died, and he says, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.

It was Christ reproduced in Stephen. Did God answer the prayer? What about that prayer of Stephen? Shall we just write that one off as one of the prayers in the book of Acts that wasn't answered? Well, I wouldn't do that. I'd rather turn over to the ninth chapter of this book and read there the conversion of a young fellow named Saul of Tarsus.

And you know, I can't help going back to the end of the seventh chapter and the prayer of Stephen when I think of the conversion of Saul. After all, it mentions his name there. It says in verse 58, the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul.

Saul was listening when this martyr prayed, and it left its indelible effect upon him. My, it's really worth praying, isn't it, if you could catch a fish like Saul every once in a while. He changed the history of civilization.

Does it pay to pray? It certainly paid as far as Stephen was concerned. Then in chapter 8, verses 15 through 17, the gospel has been down in Jerusalem. The gospel has moved out in Judea.

The gospel is now going up to Samaria. Samaria! You mean that half-breed people, the Samaritans? You mean that half-caste people, the Samaritans? Partly Jewish, partly Assyrian. Yes, the gospel is going up there.

Of course, there will be repercussions. There will be people who will hesitate, people with racial prejudices, and all the rest. But never mind, the gospel is going up there.

And Peter and John are going to go up there and pray for the Samaritans. Verse 14, Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet he was fallen upon none of them, only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. Isn't that wonderful? They go up to Samaria, they pray, lay their hands on the Samaritans, and the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit of God. The blessing is spreading.

Jesus said it would, beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. And it's spreading by prayer, if you read the book carefully. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus in chapter 9, verses 11 through 17, this fellow no sooner gets saved than he begins to pray.

That's a beautiful thing, isn't it? We talked last night, or previously, about the instinct of prayer. Yes, speaking to God as Father. And here you have this man, he had really been a fanatic in the cause of religion, and now he's going to be a fanatic for Jesus Christ.

All right, verse 10, And there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias, and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias, he said, behold, I am your Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise and go into the street which is called straight, and inquire in the house of Judas, for one called Saul of Tarsus, for he

prayeth. Isn't that lovely? He prayeth.

Saul is on his knee. He prayeth. Did God answer the prayer? Of course God answered the prayer.

He sent Ananias to him. That's a wonderful thing, isn't it? To think that God has his Ananiases stationed at strategic places, and all God has to do is say, Ananias, here I am, Lord. And I think when he said, here I am, Lord, he meant available, Lord.

What do you want me to do? Now, mind you, there was a measure of natural reluctance when the call came to Ananias, but that's nothing. In every real call of God, there seems to be a measure of natural holding back, and natural reluctance, but God the Holy Spirit is able to overcome that. Verse 12, I seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

Then Ananias answered, Lord, I've heard by many of this man how much evil he hath done to thy saints in Jerusalem. The Lord said, Don't worry. He's a chosen vessel unto me, that bear my name before the Gentiles.

Verse 17, Ananias went his way and entered into the house, and putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared to thee in the way as thou camest hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. That's a comfort. Here's a man, and he's just been saved, and he prays, and he prays with power, and God starts moving people on behalf of that man.

Thrilling, isn't it? You don't have to be old. You don't have to be along the way a long time in the Christian life. You've recently been saved.

Pray and see God work. Not only is it a thrilling truth that God has Ananias stationed at strategic places, it's also a thrilling truth that you and I can be in Ananias. Isn't that nice? You know, maybe near you there's someone ripe for salvation.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if God put his finger on you and said, Look, now, here's somebody, he's saved, but he needs follow-up work. He needs somebody to go and sit with him at the kitchen table and open the Bible and just go over some of the simple truths with him and get him built up in the faith. Are we willing to be that? Are we like Ananias, saying, Here I am, Lord, ready.

Just tell me what you want me to do. Saul prayed following his conversion, and God sent Ananias to him. He received his sight, and he received the Holy Spirit.

Then in the end of chapter 9, you have Peter praying at Joppa, and Dorcas is raised to life. Thrilling thing. Verse 36, There was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas.

The woman was full of good works and alms, deeds which she did. It came to pass in those days that she was sick and died, whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. People are all weeping, sorrowful over what has happened.

Verse 40, Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed, and turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise. She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints, it was presented to her life, and it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

Peter prayed. Woman is raised from the dead. Many believe on the Lord.

The word goes forth. It came to pass that he tarried many days in Joppa with one called Simon the Tanner. Thrilling, isn't it, to say, yeah, but we don't raise dead to life.

A more wonderful miracle than that is to present the gospel to sinners today and see them raised to life, and they see the ripples of blessings spreading, seeing God hitting families with chain lightning, and one getting saved after the other. How's it done? Prayer. Praying souls into the kingdom of God.

And then in chapter 10, you have really a wonderful study in prayer. I commend chapter 10 to you. Wonderful story about Cornelius.

Cornelius was a Roman centurion, but he was a devout man, and he was searching after God, and he used to pray, and he offered up alms to God as well. All the centurions in the New Testament are presented as righteous men. It's an interesting thing.

Not a bad one in the lot. It says in verse 2, a devout man, one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always. Now really, Cornelius was what we might call an unconverted man.

He was a proselyte to Judaism, a proselyte of the gate, but he really wasn't indwelt by the Spirit of God. He wasn't a Christian. But anyway, in a sense, he was living up to the light that God had given him, and he was praying to God.

What happened? Well, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, Cornelius, your prayers and alms are come up as a memorial before God. Now I want you, there's a man in a city about 35 miles away from here, and I want you to send him, and he'll come and tell you what you ought to know. Pretty thrilling, isn't it? And right about that same time, a man in the city about 35 miles away went up on the rooftop to pray.

His name was Peter. And as he was praying there, the Lord was saying, I've got to prepare this man for the work that he's going to do with Cornelius. So Peter fell into a trance, and he saw a sheet let down from heaven with all manner of beasts in it.

And the Lord said to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat. And Peter said, Not me, Lord. You know me, I've been a devout Jew.

I've never eaten anything that wasn't kosher yet. I don't intend to start now. But the Lord said to Peter, This is the whole point of the thing.

What God has cleansed, don't you call common or unclean. And so in a wonderful way, God set the chariot wheels in motion. And the men come to Peter's house at just the right time, and Peter goes down to Cornelius' house and tells him words whereby he might be saved.

Read verse 44 of chapter 10 of the book of Acts. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as were with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Cornelius, even an unsaved man, he's praying. God in heaven hears those prayers, and God sets things in motion. Peter comes, tells him the gospel, he trusts Christ and all his house, and the blessing starts to spread to the Gentile world.

Does it pay to pray? Well, as I go through the book of Acts, and we'll continue with this tomorrow morning, Lord willing, it just makes me want to fall down on my knees and say, Lord, teach me to pray. We turn to Acts chapter 12. We'll continue our study of prayer in the book of Acts.

You remember that yesterday we said that a subtitle to this study might be Does it pay to pray? Acts chapter 12, verse 1, About that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church, and he killed James the brother of John with a sword. Because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. Then were the days of unleavened bread.

When he had apprehended him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him, intending after Easter, or rather Passover, really, to bring him forth to the people. Peter, therefore, was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. When Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping, between two soldiers bound with two chains, the keepers before the door kept the prison.

Behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison, and he smote Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals.

And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out and followed him, and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw vision.

Down to verse 12. When he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in and told how Peter stood before the gate, and they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It's his angel.

But Peter continued knocking. And when they had opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with his hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.

And he said, Go, show these things unto James and to the brethren. And he departed and went into another place. Well, I think it might be good for us just to review these instances of prayer that we've had so far in the book of Acts.

You remember in chapter 1, we had the prayer preceding Pentecost. And the answer to that prayer was the marvelous outpouring of the Spirit of God at Pentecost, with all that followed that wonderful event. Then at the end of chapter 1, you have a prayer for a successor to Judas.

And that prayer was answered in the selection of Matthias to be his successor. In chapter 2, verse 42, you have the prayer following Pentecost, and that was answered in a state of continuous revival, souls being saved, the people of God going on happily for the Lord. Then you have prayer for boldness and power in

chapter 4, verses 24 and 29.

And the Lord did pour great power, great witness, great grace was upon them all. You have the prayer for a choice of deacons in chapter 6, verses 3, 4 and 6. And you remember that after that, the word of the Lord went forth tremendously. Then you have the prayer of the first martyr Stephen in chapter 7. And you remember we suggested that one of the answers to that prayer might have been the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, not bad, not a bad answer to prayer.

Remember in chapter 8, you have the prayer of Peter and John for the Samaritans, and that prayer was answered with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritan people. Chapter 9, verses 11 through 17, you have the prayer of Saul, Saul's first prayer after he was saved. God had Ananias ready.

Ananias came, Saul received his sight, and also received the Holy Spirit. Then you have Peter's prayer at Joppa, which resulted in the raising of Dorcas from the dead, and many believed. Chapter 10, as we closed yesterday, we had the prayer of Cornelius, a man, a righteous man, a God-fearing man, not really a believer in the Lord Jesus.

We saw the wonderful working of God preparing the heart of Peter. Peter came and told Cornelius and his household words by which he might be saved. Now, in chapter 12, verses 5 through 17, you have the prayer for imprisoned Peter.

One of the number has been placed in jail. James has been killed, Peter is in jail. What do the Christians do? It says, prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

This is an interesting thing. That was a good prayer meeting. That's the kind of a prayer meeting you'd really like to attend.

You know why? Because the best prayer comes from a strong inward necessity. You can pray best when your need is the greatest. You can pray best when the water is the hottest.

Isn't that true? And it's a strange thing, the way we do, we try to cushion ourselves and comfort ourselves and shield ourselves from all the shocks of life. And this is one of the reasons why our prayers are so dull and dead and insipid and lifeless. I'll tell you, if we had prayer meetings today, like this prayer meeting in Acts chapter 12, you wouldn't be able to keep people away with a baseball bat.

Well, God answered the prayer in a wonderful way. Peter was miraculously delivered from prison. I don't know why we should be surprised at that.

And he knew where the Christians would be and he knew what they would be doing. In verse 12, they were there and they were gathered together, praying. Prayer, as we said yesterday, with the atmosphere of the early church.

Now, it is true that Rhoda came to the door and when she saw Peter, she didn't even bother to open the door. She just left him there, cooling his heels, and went in and told the people. And they themselves were a bit unbelieving.

They didn't really, in a sense, expect that it was Peter. And I guess we tend to reproach Rhoda and the other Christians there. But honestly, I'd rather pray the way they prayed and see the answer, no matter what my reactions might be afterwards.

To me, the wonderful thing is they prayed and they prayed with power and Peter was released from prison. Wonderful thing, isn't it? Now, if you'll move over to chapter 13, we'll read the first three verses, the prayer of the prophets and teachers at Antioch. Chapter 13, verse 3. It says, Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers as Barnabas, and it goes on to mention their names.

They ministered to the Lord, they fasted. The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Now, this sounds kind of tame in a way. You think, well, just a quiet incident and they sent Paul and Barnabas away, they prayed. But I want to tell you, those prayers were some of the most far-reaching prayers that have ever been uttered because those prayers ushered in what you might call the first missionary journey of the Apostle Paul and the shockwaves of that journey are still going around the world and most of us here today, saved by the grace of God in a sense, are the fruit of that little prayer meeting in Acts chapter 13.

Now this thrills my soul when I think of it. You mean to say that a little group of people praying back there, and incidentally it was a little group, wasn't it? That they could pray back there in the first century of the history of the church and that the prayers could still be being answered today and I say that's exactly what it was. These are the prayers that sent Paul and Barnabas out on the first missionary journey and you try to measure the effect of that missionary journey today.

It's absolutely impossible to do it. Touch the ends of the earth and the results are still going on. Well then in chapter 14, verse 23, chapter 14, verse 23, in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, Paul and Barnabas prayed for those who had believed.

It says in verse 23 of chapter 14 of Acts, And when they had ordained them elders in every church and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed. Well you say, just a simple prayer for the believers for part of the fruit of their missionary endeavor. Yes, that's true.

But you know, one of those persons was probably a young man by the name of Timothy. That wasn't bad either, was it? Wonderful to think of these men and crying to God for these saints and realizing the potential for God in these people who had been born again. God raises up a young man named Timothy who goes out with the Apostle Paul and is mightily used of God.

How much we owe to Timothy today. You know what it really boils down to is that every prayer in the book of Acts is answered, isn't it? Is every prayer in your life answered? Well, I believe if you're a Christian, if you're praying in faith, the answer is yes. Every prayer is answered.

I'm a very simple believer. I don't try to solve all the mysteries of prayer. But I have a very simple faith that every prayer I pray is answered.

I have that kind of a God. The wonderful thing is He answers them in the way that's best for me. Not in the way that I always think to be best, but in the way He knows to be best for me.

God, nothing does nor suffers to be done, but what thou wouldst thyself couldst thou but see the end of all He does, as well as He. And when we get to the end of the journey and look back and think of all our prayers and think of all the answers, we're going to say, my Jesus hath done all things well. Yes, I really believe that.

I believe that all my prayers are answered by my heavenly Father. And I bless the hand that guides, and I bless the heart that plans. Well, then we come over to chapter 16 of Acts for the next instance of prayer.

Acts 16, verses 25 through 34. Paul and Silas have been arrested, these disturbers of the peace. They've been thrown into jail.

And what are they doing? Well, it says in verse 25, at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God, and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking out of his sleep and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm, for we are all here. Then he called for light and sprang in and came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? They said, Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Thy house.

Wonderful, isn't it? Here are two men in jail for Christ's sake, feeling sorry for themselves, and not a bit of it. Prayer and praise meeting at midnight. Dr. Rineside always used to comment on this verse.

He used to say that the gospel entered Europe on the wings of a sacred concert and it brought down the house. Well, it really brought down the house. An earthquake.

You know, throughout the area, the next day, if people had had newspapers, they would have been reading about an earthquake and they'd have known about the earthquake. But they wouldn't have realized that the earthquake had spiritual significance to it. And I often think of this when we read the newspaper.

We read about a famine in India. We read about an earthquake in Turkey. We read about incidents all over the world.

And in a sense, they're just news in black and white in the newspaper. But don't ever forget this. This is the spiritual significance behind every one of them.

And what it really boils down to, this was a very well-timed earthquake, wasn't it? I mean, Paul and Silas pray and all of a sudden there's an earthquake. What does it mean? Well, I'll tell you what it means. It means all things serve the man who serves Christ.

And everything is working together for good to those who love God who are the called ones according to his purpose. All things are ours and we are Christ's and Christ is God's. And Paul and Silas realized this as they prayed this God-answered prayer so marvelously.

Now, moving over to chapter 20, we have another instance of prayer. Chapter 20 and verse 36. Paul has been speaking with the elders of Ephesus.

They've come down to Miletim to meet him, and he gave this wonderful talk to them. Verse 17, From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church. He pours out his heart to them.

It's the most moving and affecting message that the Apostle Paul delivers to them. It says in verse 36, And when he had spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore and fell on Paul's

neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.

And they accompanied him unto the ship. Well, you say you're stuck, MacDonald. How is that prayer answered in the book of Acts? That's a good question, too.

Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't notice that I haven't turned it over. I'm making signs and I didn't recognize the sign.

The prayer of Paul and Silas in prison. Paul's prayer with the Ephesian elders, chapter 20, verse 36. How was this prayer answered? Well, it strikes me this way.

First of all, it brought forth a very touching demonstration of the affection of these Ephesian people for the great Apostle Paul. Just remember this. He's really on his way to the executioner's block.

And I think he knows it. He's going to roam, eventually. And he's going to put his head down on the block.

And he's going to die for Christ. It seems to me that all the way to Rome it'll be a nice thing to be able to look back to that incident with the elders at Miletum. They're praying for him and they're weeping for him.

You know, sometimes we get into tight spots in life where it's even hard for us to pray. Have you ever been there? It's awful nice to know somebody else is praying for you at a time like that. And I see these prayers of the elders of Ephesus at Miletum answered in the life of the Apostle Paul in the days that were to lie before him.

Then in chapter 21, verse 5, you have another touching incident on the beach at Tyre. First, let's go back to verse 3. 21, 3. The prayer of the Christians at Tyre. Now, when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand and sailed into Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unladen her burden.

And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days, who said to Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. When we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way. They all brought us on our way with wives and children till we were out of the city and we kneeled down on the shore and prayed.

When we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship and they returned home again. Now, once again, I believe that these prayers followed Paul to Jerusalem and followed him to Rome. He needed much of the grace, the strengthening of God in these days of difficulty that he was soon to face.

Here he knows there's the elders at Ephesus, there's these Christians at Tyre. They're praying for him. Are you conscious of the prayers of a Christian mother that have followed you down through life? I am.

I really am. Wonderful thing to have Christian friends too who are remembering you faithfully in prayer. It's real.

It works. It means a lot. Now, just two more.

Paul's prayer prior to the shipwreck. Chapter 27, verses 35 and 36. Things are getting tough there on board ship and everybody's heart is low.

The people are disconsolate. Verse 35, When he had thus spoken, he took bread and gave thanks to God in presence of them all. And when he had broken it, he began to eat.

Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some food. Wonderful, isn't it? The poise of a man of faith. I mean, it's really a tight situation, and yet he gets up and he prays, he gives thanks to God, he takes some of the food, it changes the whole atmosphere on board the ship.

You know, in prayer we speak to God, but there's more to prayer than that. There's really more to prayer than that. You realize that when a man prays, he's often edifying his hearer.

Mind you, he doesn't do it that way, but it has that effect, just the same. And I think that's very important. And here you have the Apostle Paul praying on the power in the prayer of a man of God like this.

And it brings cheer to the crew and the passengers of this ship. Say, what about the shipwreck? Paul didn't pray that they might be spared from shipwreck. If he did, it didn't say that.

The shipwreck was part of God's will. God had a strategy in getting Paul to Rome, and that was part of the strategy. Then finally, in chapter 28 and verse 8, they're on the island of Malta, and the governor's father is sick.

Acts chapter 28 and verse 8, and the Apostle Paul prays for him. It came to pass that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux to whom Paul entered in and prayed and laid his hands on him and healed him. He touched him, as it were.

He prayed and he was healed. And as far as I know, that's the last reference to prayer in the book of Acts. What a saga of answered prayer.

Now, that raises a very real problem that I think we should face before we leave this subject, and that's the problem of miracles in the book of Acts. And some of you have been thinking this as we've been going along. What about all these miracles in the book of Acts? Miraculous answers to prayer.

Are they for today? Well, they're there in the book of Acts. There's the miracle of tongues, where men could get up and speak in foreign languages that they had never studied, which is given to them miraculously. There are miracles of healing in the book of Acts.

Here's one right here. And what people oftentimes forget is not only miracles of healing, but there are miracles where sicknesses were brought on people miraculously, too. Ever think of that? There are people where... There are incidents where people became miraculously sick.

If you can pardon the expression. For instance, Herod developed a very bad case of worms and subsequently died. And there's a case of resurrection from the dead in the book of Acts.

And the case of where people were miraculously killed, too. Ananias and Sapphira and Herod himself. Rather interesting, isn't it? Cases of marvelous deliverance from prison.

Visions. A case of miraculous blindness that was brought on Elymas. Casting out of evil spirits.

And there's the prophecy of Agabus. Now, should we expect those miracles today? I think there are two extremes that we should avoid in this connection. First of all is the... is the extreme to say that whatever you find in the book of Acts you should expect that today.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This is the way He worked in Acts. This is the way He works today.

The other extreme that weighs miracles completely aside and says no miracles today. We live in a different dispensation, as it were, or God has changed. Now, both of those attitudes are wrong, I feel.

First of all is the argument Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. He did it then. He should do it today.

Well, that really isn't sound Bible teaching. For instance, the plagues that God used at the Exodus He's never repeated them. God is the same, but His methods do change.

And the miracles of God are a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit of God. And God has never obligated Himself to perform the same miracle. It says in Hebrews chapter 2 that many of these miracles were used in the early days of the church to authenticate the message of those who were preaching the gospel.

And that these were gifts of the Holy Spirit of God. Hebrews chapter 2, verse 3 says, How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him. God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders and with diverse miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Notice those last words in the verse. It says, According to His own will. Now that verse of Scripture, if it says anything at all, says the gift that miracles were given in the early days of the church to authenticate, to confirm the message of the gospel.

And they were given according to God's own will. In other words, they were a sovereign gift of the Lord. And so I don't think it's right to say that just because they existed in the book of Acts, they have to exist today.

But neither do I think it's right to say no miracles today. We have a tendency today to explain away the miraculous. And the result is that in many cases our lives don't rise above flesh and blood.

Now, to me the lasting message of the book of Acts is that our lives as Christians should be charged with supernatural power. And that you and I should be seeing miracles in our lives all the time. And I believe this.

Some of you might come up after us and take issue with me. But I believe it with all my heart and I'd like to explain it to you. I believe you and I should be seeing the marvelous meshing of circumstances in our lives continually.

God is working. I want to see God working. I want to see Him working through my life.

And if I lose that sense, I want to get back to the Lord and see where I've got out of touch with Him. I believe God wants us to see miraculous guidance in our lives. Day by day, week by week, year by year.

I believe God wants us to see in our lives things that lie beyond the range of probability. Beyond the range of chance. God working in a miraculous way.

I believe that we should see God in a marvelous range in contacts in life. Opening doors in life. And overruling opposition in life as well.

We should be seeing answers to prayer that are so unmistakable that we can only say, it's the Lord. Don't you think God wants us to have this in our lives? We should be seeing things happening for God in our

lives. If not, we should get down on our knees and ask Him, what's the matter? We should see God's hand in breakdowns.

You know, you're driving along the road, all of a sudden, pop! Something goes wrong. You say, too bad, sorry. Why did this thing have to happen? Why? Maybe there's a garage mechanic within two miles of there that should hear the gospel.

That's why. Seeing God in breakdowns, in accidents, in losses, in seeming tragedies of life. I think we should have our lives so supernatural that we see extraordinary deliverances as we're going along the way.

We should know in our lives strength and courage and wisdom and peace that lie beyond our own ability. You know, some of us might be, naturally speaking, worry warts. And I believe we should see God taking that worry away and supplanting it with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit of God.

If my life is lived only on a natural level, how am I different from the unconverted people about me? That's the question I have to ask myself. I refuse to wave aside the supernatural that you find in the book of Acts. I don't insist that God use those same miracles in my life, but I do want to see God using the supernatural.

Now, I'd like to give you an illustration of this, not out of my own life, but an illustration that came very close to me within the last two years. There was a young man that was with me overseas. His name was Greg Livingston, a young fellow, graduate of Wheaton, who really has a heart ablaze for Christ.

And about a year ago, he came back to this country in the service of the Lord. He went and spoke at a mass. And then he came over to my apartment and he spent three hours with me discussing various problems that had come up in the work over in Europe.

In fact, he brought up a particular problem during that time that had come up and he wanted to share with me. So I said to him, now, Greg, I said, there's an elder in a Midwest assembly who should know what you've told me today. And I said, you're going to go to this city and I'm going to give you his name and address so that you can contact him and tell him what you've told me today.

But before he left, I said to him, and I was just doing this purposely and he knew it, I had been with him serving. I wanted to see what made him tick. And I said to him, Greg, I'd like to ask you a question.

He said, go ahead, Mr. McDowell. I said, Greg, what's it all about? Here you are, a young fellow, graduate of Wheaton, and you give it all up and you go overseas with a group of nobodies and you throw your life away for Christ in Europe and Asia. I said, what do you see? What's it all about? And you know what he said to me? He said, I see this, Mr. McDowell.

He said, it's very hard to live a life of faith in the United States. He said, you have to put yourself in a position where you have to trust God. Where if God fails you, you're sunk.

And if you do that, he said, there'll be a power in your life. And when you touch other lives, something will happen for God. Now, I'd like to repeat that because it's a very important part of the story.

He said, I see that it's very hard to live a life of faith in the United States. You have to put yourself in a position where you have to trust God. Where if God fails you, you're sunk.

And he said, if you do that, there'll be a power in your life. And when you touch other lives, something will happen for God. Well, he went up to this city in the Midwest and he had meetings there and contacts and conferences.

He was just there a few hours, but he didn't contact the elder. And he wrote and he said, Mr. McDowell, I really believe the problem is solved to the glory of God. I didn't see the elder, but I don't really feel it's necessary.

And he had committed it to the Lord in prayer. So he left to go out to California. I wrote to him and I said, I said, well, just keep yourself open.

If the Lord wants you to do it, he'll arrange it. So he came out to Los Angeles. He had a series of meetings in Los Angeles.

His two weeks there came to an end and he got on a Greyhound bus to go back east. He was going to go back east via Lobo, Texas, wherever that is. And so he got on a Greyhound bus in Los Angeles and started back.

There were quite a few empty seats. But when the bus got to Riverside, California, the seats started filling up. And interestingly enough, every seat on the bus filled up except the seat next to Greg Livingston.

And the door was still open. And so Greg bowed his head and asked the Lord to send on some young person to whom he could testify for the Lord. Well, a man got on the bus and came and sat beside Greg Livingston.

Unfortunately, it wasn't a young person, an older man. And Greg said, young or old, I've got my duty to do for God. And so he started to witness to this man.

He started to speak to him about the Lord Jesus. And the man said to him, well, that's an interesting thing. He said, I'm a Christian myself.

And Greg said, you are? He said, my name is Greg Livingston. And the man said, my name is. And gave the name of the elder of that Midwest assembly.

And Greg wrote me and he said, Mr. McDonald, as soon as he gave me his name, he said, I knew what I had to do. And I met the elder two or three months later. And he said to me, Bill, nothing has happened in my Christian life that has spoken to me as loudly as that.

You know what happened? That elder and his wife have a daughter married in Arizona. They went down to get a drive-away car to drive out to visit their daughter. They got the drive-away car, but the drive-away car had to be delivered to Riverside, California.

So this elder dropped his wife off at the home in Arizona, and he drove the car out to Riverside to deliver the car there and got on a Greyhound bus to go back to Arizona and sat next to Greg Livingston. Now I want to ask you a question. Do you believe that God will arrange Greyhound bus schedules to serve those who are yielded to Christ? Do you? I believe God wants us to see this type of thing in my life.

In closing, may I just repeat Greg Livingston's words to you? What makes you tick, Greg? He said, I see that it's very hard to live a life of faith in the United States. You have to put yourself in a position where you have to trust God, where if God fails you, you're sunk. And if you do that, there'll be a power in your life,

and when you touch other lives, something will happen for God.

Look at the book of Acts and see what we can learn there about the church. And I'm thinking this morning particularly about the local church. I'm sure, as we have been reading in the book of Acts, that you've noticed that, largely speaking, the church in the first days of Christianity was what you might call a household church.

The meeting place was the home. And this was a tremendously startling development that came with the introduction of Christianity, because down through the Old Testament, religion had been associated with buildings on earth. In the earliest days of Judaism, God set up a tabernacle, a tent-like structure, and although it might have been rather plain and simple on the outside, it was very ornate on the inside, a beautifully embroidered veil and very costly furniture.

And then, you'll know, after the people came into the land, God instituted the temple, which was a very magnificent building, the Temple of Solomon. And in those days, as I say, worship was related to buildings on earth. But with the coming of Christianity, there was an abrupt change, and God loosed religion, shall I say, from specially sacred places.

Mr. Walden is smiling because he thought that only happened when he was speaking. God loosed religion from specially sacred places, and this signaled a great dispensational change. Why was the home so prominent in the book of Acts? Well, the reason is that with the coming of the Holy Spirit, with the coming of the Lord, men no longer worshipped in buildings on earth.

And I think this is very important for us all to grasp. We, as Christians, do not worship in church buildings, in chapels, in halls, call them what you want. The Lord Jesus said that to the woman of Samaria, didn't he? She said, Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.

Ye say that Jerusalem's the place where men ought to worship. And the Lord Jesus said, Look, that's all changed. Forget it.

The hour is coming, and now is when the true worshippers will worship in spirit and in truth. He said, Neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem. In Christianity, it doesn't really make too much difference where our bodies are, because we, by faith, ascend into the presence of God in the sanctuary of heaven.

That's a wonderful thing, and it's a truth that is largely lost sight of today. We do not worship on earth. We worship in the presence of the sovereign of the universe in the throne room in heaven.

And when we do worship, we should be conscious of that. We should be conscious of the fact that we're in the presence of God, that we're bowing there before him and telling him all that is on our heart. And so the home was entirely suitable and entirely adequate as a place for the Christians to meet.

Sometimes they met in dens, in caves of the woods, out in the moors, in deserts, and all the rest didn't make a bit of difference. Unger says that the church continued to meet in homes for about two centuries. That's interesting.

And the reason I want to emphasize this today is because I believe there are some indications that the Spirit of God is moving back in this direction again in the day in which we live. Mr. Walden was telling about a wonderful work of God's Spirit in the Colorado area, where God is raising up a group of young men who have a vision of planting, shall we say, household churches. And God has signally blessed their

efforts.

Just before I came here, I heard of five leaders of one of the prominent student organizations who have resigned their positions with that student organization and are just moving out in order to evangelize and see household cells started. I think they call them cells rather than churches, but the idea is very much the same. And I personally know of some young couples who have resigned their jobs and are moving out to districts, settling in new areas for the specific purpose of making Christ known and seeing believers gathered in the simple way in which it was done in the book of Acts.

Now, I have a question here. Why not special buildings? Well, we've all already given one reason, the very nature of Christianity. We don't ever speak of a building as being the house of God.

No building on earth is the house of God today. But that isn't all. Number one, it gives a false view of Christianity.

That is, for Christians to be having ornate, costly buildings, it's just inconsistent with the very genius of Christianity. Let me give you two illustrations of that. First of all, a man went into a magnificent cathedral in Rome and he saw a statue of the Christ Child, the Bambino.

And around the statue there were strings of costly jewels, real jewels. And the church itself was magnificently decorated with gold and all the rest. And he went out into the streets from the cathedral and on the streets of Rome he saw the emaciated faces of children who were hungry.

And he said to himself, I wonder if the Christ is enjoying his jewels. And he said, I decided that if he were, I could no longer enjoy the thought of the Christ. And he said that Bambino, with the jewels around his neck, spoke to him of what men have done with Christianity, bedecking the Christ Child with jewels while outside the door are the dispossessed and the unemployed of the world.

Rather a striking thought, isn't it? And it makes you wonder how we can justify the expenditure of vast sums of money on costly buildings when 7,000 people die daily of starvation and over half the world has never heard of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, two years ago I was standing at Speaker's Corner. We were having an open-air meeting at Speaker's Corner in London, Hyde Park.

And in the audience there were young people really from all over the world. I don't think that's an exaggeration. But after the meeting some fellows came up to us.

They were from India and some from Pakistan. And they wanted to talk to us. These fellows were not dunces.

It turned out they were in London for their graduate degrees. And one of them said to me, he said, we have no quarrel with the ethics of Jesus. We have no quarrel, he said, with the teachings of Jesus.

But he said, how can you Christians justify the expensive buildings, the expensive cathedrals you have when there's starvation in our countries? How would you answer a fellow when he comes to you with a question like that? Well, of course, if I feel a man is right, I'm not going to argue with him. And I felt he was right. And I told him so.

Now, incidentally, they have some pretty costly church buildings or religious buildings in their own countries. But that isn't the point. And it wouldn't do any good to bring that up to him.

The point is they have higher standards for Christianity than they do for themselves. And what he said to me was a subtle admission that that was the case. That they can expect that type of a Taj Mahal in their country, but they don't expect it in a Christian country.

Rather interesting, isn't it? Gives a false view of Christianity. Then, secondly, it's uneconomical. I often think, especially of some of these church buildings, beautiful structures.

Architecturally, they're tops. And used one, two, three hours a week. Now, you wonder about these things, don't you? You wonder that men ever allow themselves to be so brainwashed.

I know they wouldn't do it in their businesses. I know when they buy costly machines in business, they oftentimes think of adding another shift or two in order that the machines might be utilized around the clock in order that their investment might be realized. And yet men will spend vast sums of money in ornate edifices and use them relatively few hours a week.

It just doesn't seem economical, does it? And then, thirdly, it's perhaps the greatest hindrance to the expansion of the church. I can't help thinking that the more we go into vast building programs, the more we're slowing up the program of God on the earth. You say, how does that work? Well, I'll tell you how it works.

Let's say we build a great building and have a heavy mortgage on it. And we're really having to scrape in order to meet the principal and interest payments. Supposing at that time there's exercise of soul among some of the Christians to hive off and start another work.

What kind of a reception will it get? Well, I'm afraid, generally speaking, it'll get a rather cool reception because, after all, we have our payments to make and we need every possible bit of help in making these payments. And whether we like it or not, practically speaking, the effect of these great building programs has been a hindrance to the expansion of the church. You can see that where they concentrated in the homes, it furthered the expansion of the church because, after all, a home is rather limited in its size, usually, and when the work grows, they have to hive off.

And this is exactly what would happen in the city, apparently, and happened in Rome. If you read the 16th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, you'll find there were various household churches in Rome. They were hiving off.

They were meeting all around the city. Now, what about the arguments in favor of special buildings? Well, the first argument that's generally used is it's necessary to attract the unchurched. That is, in order to get unsaved people into the meetings, you really have to have a fairly respectable and presentable place of meeting.

Now, let us put ourselves back in the book of Acts and see what that argument is like. Well, actually, as I read the book of Acts, it seems to me that the meetings there were not for the unchurched. The meetings in the book of Acts were primarily for Christians.

You have that in Acts chapter 2, don't you? We've already read the verse, and that's why I didn't read this morning, because many of the verses we've already read pertain to this subject. But it says, verse 42, "...they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and breaking of bread and prayers." And this seems to have been the genius of the early church, that they came together as Christians in homes, and the meetings were for Christians. Then they went out from the homes, and they carried on the

evangelistic work during the week, every one of them.

And I think that's very good, too. Really, there's no substitute. There's nothing better than God's method.

In other words, they did not meet on Sunday to evangelize the un-evangelized. They met together when they met to study the Word of God, to have fellowship in the things of God, to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread, and to pray. And then Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, in their work, wherever they were, they were making Christ known.

Then when they saw people saved, they brought them into the household church, as it were. The household church was more of a feeding station and a strengthening station for those who were already converted to God. Now, that doesn't mean we shouldn't use chapel buildings today for evangelistic meetings.

I'm just going back and trying to take a fresh look at the book of Acts and see how it was done then. Then, secondly, another argument in favor of special buildings is that it was necessary, that it's necessary for Sunday school. And there is a measure of truth, this, that in many homes they are not adequate for Sunday school classes.

I rather believe that in the book of Acts the emphasis in the teaching of children was in the home, but that does raise problems, too, because what about the children in the neighborhood who do not come from Christian homes? How are they going to get taught the word of God? So this is something that we want to consider in order to give a fair, well-rounded view. But I think that there are very obvious advantages to meeting in the home, and one of them is its very informality. As I say, God loosed the church from especially sacred places and brought it into that place of universal living, and that is the home.

And I'm always interested in talking to people today. Oftentimes when you try to get them to come out to special meetings in a church building, they're not interested. They say, they say, all the church is interested in is your money.

You ever hear that? I'd just like to say very frankly today that my impression is that the unchurched people today are tired of organized Christianity. But some of those very people, if invited to come into a home, will come. If invited to come into a home for a Bible study or for a coffee hour or something, very glad to come into the home.

And incidentally, some of them don't feel that they have to dress as well coming into the home as they do. In fact, a lot of people say they just don't have clothes that would be suitable for going into the church as they envisage the building. So there is something very delightful about the informality of the home.

And as I say, I believe it's coming here in the United States. I believe the Spirit of God is moving this way in the United States. And my whole idea in presenting this this morning is that we might be open and sensitive to the leading of the Spirit of God.

It says of Isaac in the Old Testament that he was a discerner of the times and of the seasons. And we ought to be too. And we ought to be sensitive to how the wind of the Spirit is blowing and be usable of him in this connection.

Then the household church is ideal for every culture and country. You know, we're so smug here in the United States and we think, well, this is the right way to do it and what other way is there? But actually, I

have a feeling that if you could look down from heaven today over the whole world, you'd find more assemblies meeting in homes than in any other place. Does that shock you? Well, I really believe it's true.

I believe that if you could take a closer look, you could find that more are meeting probably under thatched roofs than in any other place. We think it has to be a gospel chapel or something like that. Nonsense.

Many places in the world, the people are so poor they couldn't afford a special building. But they have homes in which they can meet and this proves to be ideal for the work of God. Now, let's just go over these again before we move on because some came in late.

The subject is the local church and first of all, we're thinking about its meeting place and we noticed that in the book of Acts the meeting place predominantly was the home. Why not special buildings? Well, we said first of all because they give a false view of Christianity, especially ornate buildings, costly buildings. I can't help thinking of the Jehovah's Witnesses in this connection.

Have you ever noticed the emphasis they place on buildings and on literature? Generally speaking, they're satisfied with very modest cinder block buildings but they spend hundreds of thousands in literature. Their presses in Brooklyn are really turning out the literature by the tons in almost any language in which you could desire it. Well, it might speak to us.

Their message is wrong. In many cases, I believe their method is right. Not only so, it's uneconomical to spend vast amounts of money in buildings and use them two or three hours a week.

And thirdly, it's perhaps the greatest hindrance to the expansion of the church when the church settles down comfortably in an ornate building and it's a hindrance to a hiding off operation. Arguments in favor of special buildings. Well, we say that they're necessary to attract the unchurched, but the answer to that seems to be that, first of all, that's rather a carnal weapon with which to fight a spiritual warfare.

But we should remember that in the book of Acts they went forth with the gospel message and we're going to see that more as we go on in this study. And the second argument is that the special buildings are necessary for Sunday schools. There's a measure of truth to that.

There are arguments pro and con. You can think about that at your leisure. Advantages of the home.

Very informal, very economical, ideal for every culture and country. Now, another feature of life in the New Testament church is what we might call every member involvement. I'd like to point out, first of all, and it's good to read the book of Acts and remember this, that Christianity is a layman Christian movement.

And I'd like to read from the writings of some men who have been connected with what you might call the organized church, rather illuminating some of these quotes. Christianity, a layman's movement. Harnack claimed that, quote, when the church won its greatest victories in the early days in the Roman Empire, it did so not by teachers or preachers or apostles, but by informal missionaries.

Interesting, isn't it? Dean Inge wrote, Christianity began as a lay prophetic religion. It is on the laity that the future of Christianity depends. And he was a high church man.

Brian Green says, the future of Christianity and the evangelization of the world rest in the hands of ordinary men and women and not primarily in those of professional Christian ministers. Interesting, isn't it? And then Leighton Ford, who is on Billy Graham's team, writes, a church which bottlenecks its outreach by

depending on its specialists to do its witnessing is living in violation of both the intention of its head and the consistent pattern of the early Christians. Evangelism was the task of the whole church, not just of the name characters.

And finally, a man named James A. Stewart, I don't really know what his connection is, he writes, each member of the local assembly went out to win souls for Christ by personal contact and then brought these newborn babes back into these local churches where they were indoctrinated and strengthened in the faith of the Redeemer. They, in turn, went out to do likewise. What it really boils down to is that in the apostolic church there was no such a person as a clergyman and no such a system as the clerical system.

These men recognized that fact in so many words. Philippians chapter 1 and verse 1, Paul writing to the assembly there at Philippi, addresses the letter as follows, Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. In other words, the structure of the church at Philippi included saints, the believers, it included bishops or elders, because that's the meaning, really.

The word, it included deacons, and that is servants of the church. Now, there wasn't anyone else there. If there had been anyone else there, the apostle Paul would have had the common courtesy to recognize a clergyman, but he wasn't there.

Now, somebody says, yes, but what about the apostles who did go out in the book of Acts? Weren't they specialists? Weren't they a group of men designated to preach the gospel and to establish New Testament churches? Well, that's why we have here there were gifts to build up the saints for the work of the ministry. And you have that in Ephesians 4, verses 11 and 12. Gifts given to build up the saints for the work of the ministry.

Ephesians 4, verses 11 and 12, and he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints should be really unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ. A little bit confusing in our King James Version. It almost sounds as if there were three separate purposes there introduced by the preposition for.

Notice the three fors. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. And it almost sounds like three coordinate purposes, but that's not the idea.

The purpose of the gifts is for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the edifying of the body of Christ. If this verse says anything at all, it says that the saints are the ones who are to do the work of the ministry. Who are the ministers in the New Testament sense? Believers.

What a vision that is to see these men like Paul, and Peter, and Barnabas, and they'd go out, and they'd preach the gospel, and souls would be saved, and these men would be there, and they'd build them up in the faith, they'd carry on what we call follow-up work, so that then these people in turn could move out and do the very same thing. Move out and witness effectively for the Lord Jesus Christ and teach the word of God. The New Testament envisages every believer a witness for the Savior.

Every believer a Bible student. Every believer a teacher. That's a shocker, isn't it? To think that every believer is intended to be a teacher.

Not in the sense of these gifts, but you might turn to Hebrews chapter 5. I think it's in Hebrews chapter 5. The writer of the epistle anyway says in verse 11, "...of whom we have many things to say and hard to be

uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing." Verse 12, "...for when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong drink." Now he's really speaking to Hebrew believers here. Not just one class of believers, but to the people in general. And he's saying to them, you ought to be teachers.

I underline that in my mind. You ought to be teachers. They had been saved long enough and built up in the faith sufficiently.

The time had come when they ought to be teachers. Alright, every member involvement. Christianity, a layman Christian movement.

No clerical system. The world will never be evangelized as God intended it to be as long as we depend on a clerical system upon certain professionals carrying on the work. Christianity consists of what you might call informal missionaries.

God did give gifts to build up the saints. We have gifts today, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. And their purpose is not that the saints become perpetually dependent upon them, but that the saints be built up so they can go forth and carry on the work of God.

Then God also did give elders to govern in the local church. Elders who by their lives and godly example are guides to the people of God. And I think this is very important to remember.

And we're going to be saying more about that as we go on. And then he also gave, he also sets up deacons to serve. And Mr. Walden has already spoken about that word.

I believe anyone who is not an elder who does serve the local assembly is a deacon. Just a suggestion. Not someone who's elected, but anybody who's ministering in connection with the local assembly and who is not an elder is a deacon.

Every member involved. Now, I have a list here of some unusual pulpits that were used in the book of Acts. And you'll probably wonder why I went to such detail to do this, but I'll draw the lessons as we close.

Unusual pulpits. First of all, you'll find in the book of Acts that they love to preach in the open air. This is very, very interesting.

I could give you a list of the places where the open air is used, and it's quite a formidable list. They preached in the temple in Byron's. It wasn't exactly the easiest place in the world to preach, but they went there and they preached there.

They preached in the Jewish, before the Jewish Sanhedrin. They were always having scrapes with the civil law and with the religious law. They often found them there in front of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

I mean, this wasn't exactly the way they had planned it, but this is the way it turned out. They preached down by the river. They preached in the marketplace.

They preached on Mars Hill, at least Paul did. Preached from the stairs of the fortress of Antomio. They preached in the synagogues as long as they were able to do it.

They preached in private homes as well. One man at least witnessed in a chariot, Philip, with the Ethiopian eunuch. The ship proved a pretty good pulpit for the Apostle Paul.

He reasoned in the schoolroom of Tyrannus. They went everywhere, it says, preaching the gospel. And a very common place for preaching was the civil courts.

Now, what does that mean? I purposely made that list of places where witnessing was carried on in the early days of the church. Well, it speaks very loudly to me like this. There were very few prepared messages in the book of Acts.

Did you ever think of that? There were very few instances in the book of Acts where a man got up and prepared a message and delivered it. Most of the preaching in the book of Acts was done in the normal routine of life and especially when crises came up. As a result of their godly lives, for instance, they oftentimes ran into trouble with the law.

And so they'd be arrested and they'd be brought before a tribunal. They said, wonderful, this is a good opportunity to preach Christ. And they never missed a chance.

And what the lesson really is to me in the book of Acts was that preaching wasn't the performance of an hour but the overflow of a life. I think that's very, very significant and I hope we don't allow the Lord to waste it on us. Preaching in the book of Acts was not the performance of an hour but the overflow of a life.

It wasn't as formalized as we have it today. You just had people living their lives, living Christ, witnessing for Christ as they went along. And no matter what came along, they thought, well, here we are, a good opportunity to speak for Jesus Christ.

And what happened? Well, the preaching was extemporaneous. And it's just the same old story. Don't worry in advance what you're going to say.

The Lord will give you in that moment what you'll say. And they were pretty tremendous messages, weren't they? And had pretty tremendous results. Seems to me that the early Christians majored in the culture, the cultivation of a godly life, the fruit of the Spirit in their own lives.

And then it bubbled out from them and how effective it proved. Well, tomorrow, Lord willing, we'll go on and take some more looks at just what took place in the book of Acts. Kind of refreshing, isn't it, to go back and breathe the pure air of the early church.

We continue with Mr. MacDonald on the book of Acts, on cassette number three.

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