

Does It Pay to Pray

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald explores the transformative power of prayer in the early church as recorded in the book of Acts.

Duration: 1:09:30

Scripture: Acts 1:14-26, Acts 2:42, Acts 4:24-31, Acts 6:1-7, Acts 12:17, Hebrews 2:3

Topics: "Prayer Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of prayer in the work of serving Christ. He refers to the Book of Acts and highlights the power of a united prayer. The speaker shares a conversation he had with a missionary who explained that living a life of faith in the United States requires complete trust in God. The sermon also mentions the story of Peter and John being released from prison and the prayer of the believers for boldness.

Transcript

Please correct chapter 1 and we'll begin reading in verse 9. Acts chapter 1, verse 9, says, And when he 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 as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from a mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey.

And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter and James and John and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zeloti, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his presence." Now, yesterday we were speaking about the centrality of the filling of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. The book of Acts is really a wonderful book.

You can hold it up like a diamond and see its colors glisten in different lights. Today, we'd like to think of the book of Acts as a manual on prayer, and we'd like to just look at some of the references to prayer in this wonderful book, and it's a subtitle for our Bible study this morning. We might call it, Does It Pay to Pray? And we're going to take up every incident, at least I think we are, dealing with prayer in the book of

Acts, and look at the prayer and then see, did anything happen? Did you just pray and nothing happened? Well, we'll see.

The first prayer mentioned in the book of Acts is the prayer for Pentecost in the verses we just read, chapter 1, verses 12-14. The Lord Jesus has ascended into heaven. The disciples go back to the upper room in Jerusalem and are gathered there, and interestingly enough, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is there.

This is the last reference to Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the New Testament, and it's an interesting thing that in this last reference, she's found in prayer with the disciples. You don't find the disciples praying to Mary, but you find her praying with the disciples. There they are, they're all with one accord, they're all vowed in prayer before God.

What were they praying about? You guess? Well, they were praying for the coming of the Spirit, weren't they? Exactly what they were praying for. They were praying for the coming of the Spirit. Just a humble band of simple believers gathered there on their knees in an upper room.

Will anything happen? Does it pay to pray? The answer to that prayer is found in chapter 2 of the book of Acts. The Spirit of God came and power was poured out upon the disciples and all the believers were baptized into the body of Christ. It was a wonderful time of prayer and wonderful answer came.

Let me ask you this morning, you who are believers, do you ever pray for the Spirit? You say, Mr. MacDonald, what new heresy is this? You said yesterday that when we're saved we're indwelt by the Spirit. Well, that's absolutely true, and yet there is a sense in which we do and should pray for the Spirit of God today. We should pray for the Spirit of God to come upon us in power for our service for Christ.

Do you ever pray for that? I think we ought to start. Jesus said, if you being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give Holy Spirit to them that ask him? And we're told by some Bible students that when the article V is left out, when it just says, give Holy Spirit, that it means not the person of the Holy Spirit, but the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And I just like to suggest to you this morning that it might be a good thing for all of us to be more exercised about this.

That as we start the day, that we might ask that the Spirit of God might be upon us in power as we go forth in this day, arranging the context of the day, arranging the telephone calls of the day, supervising in the letters that are written and the conversations that are held, that we might see God in all the circumstances of life, day by day. Well, it was a wonderful time of prayer, this first prayer meeting in the book of Acts, and think of a wonderful answer. The answer was Pentecost and the giving of the Spirit.

The second prayer that you have is in verses 24 through 26, and that's the prayer for a successor to Judas. It says in verse 24, And they prayed and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of the ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lot, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Now, I know there's a lot of controversy among Christians as to whether Matthias was really the choice of whether it should have been the Apostle Paul. For my own part, I'm convinced that these disciples were acting in the fear of God. They took it to the Lord in prayer and asked the Lord to show his will in the matter, and I'm persuaded he did.

I don't think it was ever God's intention that Paul should have been numbered with the twelve. The important thing here is with their simplicity. They face a crisis in life.

They go back to the Old Testament scriptures and they see that somebody should be appointed to take the place of Judas. What are you going to do about it? How can you know the mind of God in a case like this? They had only one resource, and that resource was prayer. They prayed and the lot fell to Matthias.

Now, this was, of course, before the Holy Spirit was given. We don't believe that you should use the lot today, the casting of lots, but you don't have to. We have the Spirit of God, and he has promised to guide us in all the affairs of life.

Is there someone here this morning at the crossroad perhaps facing a crisis in life, having to make a decision, and you don't know which way to go? The answer is prayer. Get down before the Lord. Bring it before the Lord.

Wait patiently upon the Lord. God has promised to show. And the third instance of prayer is in chapter two of the book of Acts, verse 42, and this is general prayer following Pentecost.

Verse 41 says, this is chapter two. Verse 41 says, Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.

Now, here prayer was the atmosphere of their life. It wasn't just some specific crisis that came up that drove them to prayer, it was the air that they breathed. Did God answer that prayer? Was it just going through the motion, spinning the prayer wheel? No, just read the following verses, and I can't help feeling that the following verses are all part of the context, and this is the answer.

Fear came upon every soul. Many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. All that believed were together and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need.

And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people that the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved or those that were being saved. They pray in verse 22. What is the answer to the prayer in verse 22? The answer, as far as I can see in the verses that follow, is continuous revival.

They were living in a state of continuous revival, and I believe this is God's will for us today. I don't think God wants us to be on the spiritual roller coaster, up one minute and down the other. I believe God wants us to be walking in the spirit, abiding in the spirit, living in the spirit.

What is the lesson we learn from chapter 2, verse 42? We learn the work is done in prayer, and I really believe this. I really believe with all my heart that the principal work in service for Christ is done on our knees. That's the thrilling thing to me about the book of Acts, to see an army, a five-ranked army of fools, as far as the world is concerned, moving forward on their knees and affecting the world for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, then it's rather thrilling to turn over to chapter 4 and find their prayer for boldness there. Chapter 4, verses 24 and 29. Now, Peter and John have just been released.

They've been in trouble with the law, and of course it was for Christian propaganda activities, and it says in verse 23, being let go, they went to their own company and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said, and this is a wonderful prayer. I'm going to read it.

It says, Lord, thou art God which has made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is, who by the mouth of thy servant David hath said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people an edge and vain thing? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy should be servant Jesus, whom thou hast anointed both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word by stretching forth thy hand to heal, that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." There's something thrilling about this, something that makes you proud to be a Christian.

When you see these Christians, Peter and John have just been released from jail, and they come together and they say, my, this reminds us of the second Psalm somewhat. And here the Gentiles and the peoples are gathered together in opposition to the Lord and to his Christ. Why do they do that? And they go and list the enemies of the gospel here.

But I think the thrilling thing you want to notice is the calm and the poise of these Christian people in prayer. There's no frenzy here. They're not frantic here.

They're not falling apart the scene. They list them off carefully before God. For the truth against thy servant Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, Herod, Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together.

But then notice the reverse twist in verse 28. You would think they would have said they're gathered together to do what they jolly well pleased to do against thee and against the gospel, but that isn't what it says. It says, these wicked world rulers and people gathered together to do whatever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

And I just believe that pleased the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ when he saw those feeble disciples down there in the world, and they realized that he held the scepter of universal dominion and that not all the kings of the earth could do a single thing apart from him. Wonderful, isn't it? They gathered together to do what you had determined beforehand was going to be done. I've often told the story of a prayer meeting back in Chicago when a couple of young Christians went to it, and these young people had prayed all night, laying hold of God for countries of the world.

And I spoke to one of those young men the next day, and I said to him, what was it like? He said, I can't tell you. He said, you'd have had to be there to know what it was like. He said, all I can tell you is this.

He said, one of those fellows started praying for Russia and for the Iron Curtain, and he said when he got through, Khrushchev looked like a midget. That's what happened in this prayer meeting, too. They were praying, and before they got through Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Jews and the Gentiles, they looked like midgets.

Now, what did they pray for specifically? This is another beautiful thing. They didn't pray for safety. They didn't pray for protection.

They didn't pray for long life. They didn't think that was the important thing. They prayed for boldness.

Verse 29, Now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word. Brilliant, isn't it? Did God answer the prayer? Does it pay to pray? Verse 31, And when they had prayed, the place was shaken, where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, but they spake the word of God with boldness. Some people say, you know, I have trouble speaking for the Lord.

When I start to speak for Jesus, my lips turn to blubber, and I just find it difficult to get the words out. What do you do in a case like that? Tell the Lord about it. Tell the Lord about it, and ask the Lord for holy boldness in proclaiming His word, in witnessing for Him.

God answers prayer. What's it been thrilling to be in a place like that? Have you ever been in a prayer meeting where the place was shaken? Well, I haven't. It's a thrilling, thrilling experience, not only where the place was shaken, but where human hearts are shaken as well.

I tell you, when we get down before the Lord in desperate, believing prayer, lives are transformed in a prayer meeting like that. But then we turn over to chapter 6, and we find prayer for the choice of deacons. Chapter 6, and this is beautiful, too.

Some lovely touches here. Let's begin back in verse 1. 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 believers, some of these of 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 Procorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, the 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? It's a big problem today. The problem is always the personal problem, interpersonal relationships.

Prayer is sufficient. They get down on their knees, they pray, 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, as beautifully, he said, "...learn to move men through God by

prayer." Learn to move men 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 task that rippled through that Christian company, just to think that some of the priests in Jerusalem were becoming obedient to the faith, pray 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, 54. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart and they gnashed him with their teeth.

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up and 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 in 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 lay 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. 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 saying, 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, but 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.

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? It changed the history of civilization. Does it pay to pray? It certainly paid, as far as Stephen was concerned.

Then in chapter eight, verses 15 through 17, the gospel had been down in Jerusalem, the gospel had moved out in Judea, the gospel is now going up to 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. A quick conversion of Saul of Tarsus in chapter 9, verses 11 through 17. This fellow, as soon as he gets saved, 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. Verse 10, And there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias, and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias, 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 knees. He's praying.

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? 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've seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hands 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 Bethlehem to me to bear my name before 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 be 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 praying. 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? He may be 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 from God's sin. Ananias, to him, 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. A woman who was full of good works and armed deeds, which she did came to pass in those days that she was sick and died, and when they had washed, they laid her in another chamber. People are all weeping sorrowful over what had 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 and was presented her alive, and it was known throughout all Joppa that many believed in the Lord. Peter prayed. The woman is raised from the dead.

Many believe on the Lord. The word goes forth. Seeing the path that he carried many days in Joppa with one called Simon the Tanner.

Thrilling, isn't it? To say, yes, but we don't raise the dead to life. 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 blessing 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 arms 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 heart, which gave much arms 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 engulfed 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 arms have come up with a memorial before God. Now I want you with a man in a city about 35 miles away from here, and I want you to send to 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 a 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, why, 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.

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 him speak with tongue 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 me? 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 among 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. 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 hand to vex certain of the church. 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 quaternion 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, as chains fell off from his hands. The angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did.

And he saith unto him, Cast thy garments 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 in 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 is the angel. But Peter continued knocking. When they had opened the door and saw him, they were astonished that 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. 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 to 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. He 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? 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 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, was 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.

A wonderful thing, isn't it? Now, if you'll move over to chapter 13, and I will 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, it's 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, 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 believed.

What do 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 crying to God for these things and realizing the potential for God in these people who have 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 faithfully, 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 wilt thyself could 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 has 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 playeth.

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 have 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. The keeper of the waking 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 the Sultan, 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 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 but called ones according to his purpose. All things are ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God. 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, in verse 36, Paul has been speaking with the elders of Ephesus. They've come down to Miletus 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, and fell on Paul's neck, 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, McDonald. 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 hadn't turned it over.

I burnt making signs, and I didn't recognize the sign. The prayer of Paul and Silas in prison. How are 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 Rome 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 the disciples,

we carried there seven days, who sent 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 of 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 hearers. 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, and there's power in the prayer of a man of God like this, and it brings cheer to the crew and the passengers of this ship.

Then 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. Do you ever think of that? There are people where there are incidents where people became miraculously sick, if you can pardon the expression. This is Herod.

A fellow with a very bad case of worms subsequently died, and there's a case of resurrection from the dead in the book of Acts, and this is a 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 Elamith, casting out of evil spirits, and there's a 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 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. Now, 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. You know, 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. Now, I believe this. Some of you might come up afterwards 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 mishing 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 way arranging 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 be 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-wart, 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, a graduate of Wheaton, who really had the 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 Emmaus, 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. McGall. I said, Greg, what's it all about? Here you are, a young fellow, a graduate of Wheaton, and you give it all up, and you go overseas with a group of nobody, 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. McGall. He said, 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.

Well, 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. Well, 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. Well, 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 me. He said, Mr. McGall, 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 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 with 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, started to speak to him about the Lord Jesus, and the man said to him, well, that's an interesting thing.

He said, 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. MacDonald, 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 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.

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