



Teaching God's Word to Train Disciples

Fellowship BIBLE CHURCH

Audio of Pastor Don Griffin's sermons is available at
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This is the third week that I've spoken on building a church God can use. We have looked at Acts 2:42 at the pattern of the first Christians two thousand years ago. The Bible verse says those early believers were committed to four priorities. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching [the message and mission of Jesus] and to the fellowship [the sense of belonging that made them a caring place and not just a crowd], to the breaking of bread [either regular meals together or the Lord's Supper or both] and to prayer.

Building a Church God Can Use

Prayer Part 3

Today, we are going to talk about prayer. We believe in prayer, and when we come together on Sunday mornings, we actually do more praying than you may realize. There are numbers of times that we stop and pray, but more than that I think that we have an atmosphere of praying. Have you ever thought about the fact that many of the songs we sing are simply prayer set to music? When we sing those songs we are singing to God, and that is prayer.

Individually, I find prayer to be a strange thing in my life. Even though I love to pray, I find that there is nothing that my flesh resists quite as much as being still and seeking the Lord. Prayer is at the same time the sweetest privilege we will ever enjoy on earth, and also the greatest struggle we will endure. Ask believers about their spiritual battles, and most of them will tell you that have a hard time praying like they should.

1. MAKE PRAYER A PRIORITY

Colossians 3:2, Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should."

The word "devote literally means "to give constant attention to a thing." It means to "wait continually" on that thing. If you have a seriously sick child, you will be constantly observing that child. Even if you are talking with someone, you are still conscious of what is going on with your child. When Paul says devote yourselves to prayer, he is saying our hearts should always be tune to God in prayer.

Why should prayer be such a priority to us? We pray because we believe in God, and we believe that He answers prayer. Prayer is not some form of self talk. Neither is it just good therapy. Prayer connects us with the living God who delights in hearing and answering our requests, and there are examples of that all over Scripture.

James 5:17-18, "17Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."

Elijah prayed to God that it would not rain, and in answer to his prayer, it did not rain for 3 ½ years. The background of this incident is found in 1 Kings 17-18. Wicked King Ahab and Jezebel, his queen, had led Israel away from the Lord and into the worship of Baal. God punished the nation by holding back the rain that they needed for their crops. And after the 3 ½ years, Elijah prayed again asking God to bring rain, and God brought the rain just as he had stopped the rain before.

Just so that we won't miss something here, James is clear to tell us that Elijah was a man just like us. He was not some kind of spiritual superman. He was

just a person like you and me, but he believed God. And God answered his believing prayer.

As a church, we're to devote ourselves to prayer because prayer does more than anything else we can do to make us the right kind of church. If all of our members were true prayer warriors, everything else in the church would take care of itself. If our entire church were made up of prayer warriors, then we would have no problem winning people to Christ. We would have no problem with people growing in their spiritual lives. Ministries would flourish, and we would never lack the money to do what we need to do. Every movement for God has always been preceded by prayer.

"Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure." D. L. Moody

"God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it." John Wesley

"A Godly man is a praying man. As soon as grace is poured in, prayer is poured out. Prayer is the soul's traffic with Heaven; God comes down to us by His Spirit, and we go up to Him by prayer." T. Watson

"There is no power like that of prevailing prayer of Abraham pleading for Sodom, Jacob wrestling in the stillness of the night, Moses standing in the breach, David heart-broken with remorse and grief, Jesus in sweat and blood. Such prayer prevails. It turns ordinary mortals into men of power. It brings power. It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God." Samuel Chadwick

2. BE SENSITIVE TO NEEDS

Colossians 4:2 goes on to say that when we pray, we should be watchful. To be watchful is to be looking for something to happen. Have you ever had people over to visit your home and you kept looking out the window to see if they had arrived?

Psalms 130:6, "My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning."

The watchmen spoken of in vs 6 were the men who stood guard on the walls that protected the city to watch for an approaching enemy. If they didn't do their jobs, they and the rest of the city could be attacked and killed. So, these watchmen were very serious about what they did. And we should be

watchful about things that are in our lives and the lives of those around us so that we can pray about those things.

Sometimes people say, "I don't know what to pray about." Think about the needs in your family, your extended family and your church family. Be aware of what is happening in the lives of people in your neighborhood and people on your job. And if you still don't have enough to pray about, turn on the news.

3. PRAY THAT WE WILL HAVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINISTRY

God has a big picture for our world, and our church fits into that big picture. God's big picture is played out one day, one hour, one moment at a time, and with it, there comes countless opportunities.

In our schools there are thousands of students who need to hear about the God who loves them and has a plan for their life. There are people whose lives have been wrecked by sin and they need to know that God can put things back together for them. There are those who are overcome with despair, and they need to know there is hope. Pray that God will open doors of ministry for this church.

4. PRAY THAT WE WILL NOT LET SETBACKS STAND IN OUR WAY

You can never plan for the future by looking at the past. You have to move forward. The Apostle Paul knew what it was to have setbacks.

Colossians 4:3, "And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains."

Paul spent a significant part of his ministry behind bars, but he never stopped preaching, he never stopped writing, he never stopped encouraging churches. In fact, prison was not the only setback Paul experienced. Listen to how Paul describes his life.

[I have] been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the

open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city; in danger in the country; in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:24-28)

All I can say is: Wow! Can you imagine facing those kinds of setbacks and still pressing on? Paul refused to allow any obstacle to stand in his way. He simply would not give up.

The fact is, we will experience setbacks in our ministry. There will be times when it seems like we are going backward instead of forward. There will be times when you are disappointed because something did or did not happen. Sometimes people will hurt you. Sometimes God will seem distant and silent. There will be times when quitting seems like the best thing to do. No matter how much we feel like giving up, we must remain faithful. We must stay in the battle. We must continue to pursue the ministry to which God has called us.

5. MAKE PRAYER PERSONAL

Dwight L. Moody once said, "God always uses the man closest to him." When you go to God in prayer, don't just pray for praying's sake. Seek to draw near to God. Daniel 11 speaks of a future time of great trouble and hardship that is to come on our world.

Daniel 11:1, "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then."

This is a time when God will judge the earth. It will be a time that is harder than anything we have ever known or that we can imagine. But in the midst of that terrible time, there is great hope.

Daniel 11:32 says, "The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits."

We also live in a terrible time and one which could become much worse. The scripture says that as bad as it may become, God is looking for people who will love him and draw close to Him so that He can work mightily through them. If we're to become a church that God can use to do great things, we must commit ourselves to drawing close to God. It's not enough to know about God. It's not enough to know about his ways and practice them. We must learn to know God personally, and there's only one way to do that. We must spend quality time in his presence.

Charles Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers who has ever lived. Spurgeon had a time that he would get alone with God everyday. One day he was having his quiet time with the Lord, a visitor came to see him.

The maid went to the door and said, "I'm sorry you cannot see Mr. Spurgeon, he's in prayer. The man said, "Would you go tell Mr. Spurgeon that it's very urgent that I see him?"

The maid came back and said, "Mr. Spurgeon said he cannot be disturbed." Finally, the man said, "Would you tell Mr. Spurgeon that a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ is here and needs to see him?" The maid went and Spurgeon said to her, "Would you go tell the man that though he is a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, I am busy with his Master and therefore I cannot speak to the servant." It was not Spurgeon's sermons that gave him such success. He was successful in God's work because he knew God in a deep and personal way.

6. WE MUST PRAY IN FAITH

If you want to know what God wants from you in prayer, the answer is "faith." You see that all over the Bible.

Psalm 5:3, "In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; In the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation."

The issue of faith is very important to God. Mark 6 tells the story of Jesus going back to minister in His hometown. When He got there, the people didn't believe in this hometown boy. As a result of their unbelief, chapter 6:5-6 says, "He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them." Unbelief will hinder the blessings of God.

Two men went fishing. One man was an experienced fisherman, but the other wasn't. Every time the experienced fisherman caught a big fish, he put it in his ice chest to keep it fresh. Whenever the inexperienced fisherman caught a big fish, he threw it back. The experienced fisherman watched this go on all day and finally got tired of seeing this man waste good fish. "Why do you keep throwing back all the big fish you catch?" he asked. The inexperienced fisherman replied, "I only have a small frying pan." Sometimes, like that fisherman, we throw back the big opportunities that God gives us because our faith is too small.

I said earlier that God has a big picture for our church, and every one of us fit into that picture. We must pray that God will reveal his plan for ourselves, for other church members and for our church body as a whole. We can do a whole lot after we pray, but we can do nothing of eternal value until we pray.