

KEYS TO THE ACTS

KEY #5 -- EFFECTIVE PRAYER

The greatest sin in America today is prayerlessness.

We need to pray in these days more than we've ever prayed before. And our prayer meetings should become one of the focal points of our church ministry. And in our lives, our times of prayer should become more and more important.

Prayer is vital. We will look at prayer in the Acts in three areas: Fellowship; Guidance; and Service.

1. Fellowship

Acts 1:14. There was fellowship in prayer.

I remember attending a prayer meeting at a church once. There were 30 or 40 people there but total silence! I approached one lady sitting in a pew and asked her what was going on. "We're praying quietly", she said. It's a good thing she told me...I thought they were napping! Folks, God can hear any prayer: loud ones and ones you whisper from your heart. But if you want to pray quietly, you can pray at home! How can we agree together if I don't know what your needs are?

Acts 2:42. Doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. 3,000 began on the basis of doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.

There's an old saying that's been so overused it's become hackneyed. Yet it's true: "The family that prays together stays together", the same is true of churches.

There's a fellowship in prayer.

Acts 6:4. There are some who have a special ministry of prayer. Pastors and evangelists have a greater responsibility to pray. That's the pastor's greatest responsibility: to pray for his congregation, and a ministry not backed by prayer will be an ineffective ministry.

Acts 9:11. The first comment about Saul of Tarsus--he was praying.

There must be hundreds of references in the epistles to praying or praying for one another.

Col. 1:9. One of the thrilling things to discover when reading the letters of Paul is the tremendous depth of his prayer life. Refer to ***Eph 1:15ff.*** Paul says he "makes mention of you" in his prayers, if that's just making mention, whatever did he do when he really prayed? He had profound prayers! And God gave him revelation upon revelation, and he taught the church to pray, ***1 Thess. 5:17.*** Pray without ceasing.

2. Guidance

Acts 1:24, filling the gap left by Judas.

I had applied for a pastoral position at an independent church when I first entered the ministry. After I had preached the sermon, I went to the office and met with the board. We prayed, and before they would hire me, they told me that they had to consult with the church "prophet"! They asked him about me, and the prophet replied, in perfect King James English, "Brothers, he sounds good to me". Well, needless to say, I left that place in a hurry, unemployed!

We don't need special voices like that. There's a ministry of prayer where we can see God over ruling and guiding, and we can be lead of the Lord.

The early church didn't make a mistake in choosing that man to take Judas' place. Some people think they should have waited for Paul. But they were obeying God. Some say you never hear about this man in the Acts. Well, you never hear from most of the apostles, only the prominent once. Most were working behind the scenes. When the church was scattered abroad, kicked out of Jerusalem, they ran for their lives, but the apostles--all of them--remained in Jerusalem to pray and lead the scattered church, at great risk to their lives.

Acts 6:6.

Acts 13:2-3.

Acts 14:23.

In the work of God, we need divine guidance. We can make plans, we can seek to walk wisely, but there are things we can never perceive, in the spiritual realm, hidden from us. We need divine guidance. Many of us can tell stories about that kind of guidance

3. Service

Acts 3:1 Peter and John went up for the "prayer meeting" (J.B. Phillips), but it was this background of prayer that made them effective when they met a need. They met a need and they were able to MEET that need. The prayer of preparation is most important.

Smith Wigglesworth once said, "I can't pray 30 minutes to save my life, but there's never 30 minutes of my waking life that I'm not praying sometime." Prayer is important!

One time when I was pastoring a small country church, I had a family that attended regularly that lived just outside the town landfill site. And they smelled like it. One day, I was intending to visit the hospital, and as I was driving past the landfill site, I felt the Lord impress upon me the need to visit this family. I didn't really want to, but I turned in the road to the landfill, and I saw Mr. Buckley pacing the driveway as I pulled in. He ran up to me and grabbed and said that he had been praying that I would show up. They were poor and didn't have a phone to call, you see. I went in the house, and over in the corner I saw Mr. Buckley's father, lying on a cot, covered in an old Navy pee coat. His son told me he was dying but wanted to see the pastor. I went over and knelt by the bed and took the old man's hand. He said in a weak voice, "I'm looking for God, but can't find him". I prayed with him, led him to Jesus and moments later Mr. Buckley senior passed away.

If you pray in your service, you'll be sensitive to the Lord and know His moving and direction and you'll see opportunities where none exist. You'll be made alert by His grace.

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