

Prayer in the Book of Acts: Vibrant Worship

We started a new series last week, Prayer in the Book of Acts. History has shown that great spiritual awakening and/or positive social and community transformation happened when God's people prayed.

Pastor Jeremy reminded us last Sunday that prayer releases God's power to His people to accomplish God's purposes:

We need to pray together to receive more power.

Receiving more power requires us to persevere in prayer.

This morning we will look at how prayer is an expression of vibrant worship.

Friedrich Nietzsche, a 19th century philosopher, wrote about a madman in "The Parable of the Madman": Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market-place, and cried incessantly: "I am looking for God! I am looking for God!" As many of those who did not believe in God were standing together there, he excited considerable laughter. Have you lost him, then? said one. Did he lose his way like a child? said another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he

gone on a voyage? or emigrated? Thus they shouted and laughed.

The madman sprang into their midst and pierced them with his glances. "Where has God gone?" he cried. "I shall tell you. We have killed him - you and I. We are his murderers ... God is dead. God remains dead ... It has been further related that on that same day the madman entered divers churches and there sang a requiem ... Led out and quietened, he is said to have retorted each time: "what are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?"¹

While the cry of "God is dead" is often associated with Nietzsche's parable, many have missed the cynical rhetorical question about the lifelessness of the contemporary church: "what are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?" But such cynicism and critique could hardly apply to the vibrant worship in the early gatherings.

Acts 2:42 All the believers ***devoted*** themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to ***prayer*** ... ⁴⁶ They ***worshiped*** together at the Temple² each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity —⁴⁷ all the while ***praising God and enjoying***

¹ http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/philosophy/friedrich_nietzsche_quotes.html

² It's called a house of prayer for all nations, cf. Mk. 11:17.

the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

There's no doubt that Jesus' followers in Acts are people of prayer; Luke tells of 30+ times the believers being at prayer.³

Prayer is an integral part of church life and its group gatherings because it connects Jesus with His people who are sent to carry out kingdom work under His Spirit's guidance and empowerment.

So the first observation about how prayer is an expression of vibrant worship is this:

Prayer ascribes to God the transforming power of living well in community.

In Acts 1-2, we read about the Pentecost, Peter's preaching, and 3,000 were baptized; and Luke then gives a summary,

Acts 2:42 All the believers **devoted** themselves ... to **prayer** ... **praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people.**

In Acts 3-4 Luke tells the healing of Crippled Beggar, Peter & John's arrest and boldly testifying before the Jewish

³ We can see that prayer is an integral part of church life and its group gatherings (4:24; 6:4; 12:5; 13:3; 20:36) because it connects Jesus with His people who are sent to carry out kingdom work under His Spirit's guidance and empowering (4:29-30; 6:6; 8:15; 14:23; 28:8).

leaders, and another 5,000 believed. Luke then gives another summary:

Acts 4:23 As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers ... ²⁴ When they heard the report, **all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God** ...

From the way Luke tells the story we see here the reasons for the early Christians to praise God in prayer are clear:

The supernatural infusion of the Spirit's indwelling and power embolden the first believers to proclaim the message of the Messiah and to participate in kingdom work.

The evidence of life-change in individuals, families, neighbourhood, and city transformation is captured.

The prayers of praise flow out of an acknowledgement of human limitations and divine enablement in both good⁴ and trying circumstances.⁵

How then should we pray?

❖ Develop consistent private worship in preparation for public participation of praise.

As it's been said, "The vitality of the church was a measure of the reality of their prayers." (David Williams)

⁴ I.e., signs and wonders and mission success

⁵ I.e., life threatening persecution and difficult situations

According to the most recent research paper by CARDUS, a non-partisan think tank based in Hamilton - *“The Shifting Landscape of Faith in Canada”* – reports in November 2022: “Public and individual religious practices are particularly declining in Canada: about 46 percent of Canadians indicated they pray at least once a month in 2018, compared to 36 percent in 2022. From 2020 to 2022, around 16 percent of Canadians said they attend a religious service other than a wedding or funeral once a month or more, compared to about 22 percent in 2017 to 2018.”⁶

For many believers Sunday is the only time they spend in praise and worship; it’s their weekly inspirational/uplifting moment or desert oasis for another week of wilderness wandering to come – it is far from being the highlight or celebration of the week.

But the early believers have demonstrated that a sacrifice of praise is offered everyday; individual worship experiences of God’s greatness and goodness are brought together when they gather as a corporate body – every Christ-follower is plugged in every day, not just on Sunday. On Sunday – the Lord’s Day - the celebration is on and the neighbours and the people on the streets of Jerusalem are

drawn in by the passion, love, signs and wonders of God’s transforming power in the church gathering!

Heb. 13:15 Through Jesus, therefore, **let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise**—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

Cf. Since the beginning of 2023 as part of my daily reading, I have been encouraged and challenged by James Merritt’s *52 Weeks Through the Psalms*.⁷

When prayer is bathed in Scripture, our faith is deepened in times of trial and testing; this appropriately leads to the second way how prayer is an expression of vibrant worship:

Prayer anchors our faith in the outworking of God’s agenda.

Acts 4:23 As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. ²⁴ When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God: **“O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them ...**

“Sovereign Lord” and “Creator” underline this truth:

⁶ <https://www.cardus.ca/research/faith-communities/reports/the-shifting-landscape-of-faith-in-canada/>

⁷ https://www.amazon.ca/52-Weeks-Through-Psalms-One-Year/dp/0736969438/ref=sr_1_1?crd=2WUNOD2AR04PK&keywords=52+weeks+th

[rough+the+psalms&qid=1695054318&srefix=52+weeks+through+the+psalms%2C+aps%2C115&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.ca/52-Weeks-Through-Psalms-One-Year/dp/0736969438/ref=sr_1_1?crd=2WUNOD2AR04PK&keywords=52+weeks+th)

Since God is in control of world and salvation history, no matter how circumstances seem grim and gloomy, ***there is nothing to fear if God's people are obedient.***

In fact this gives ***hope and courage*** in the midst of crisis because God knows the hearts of His people and His purpose will not be derailed.

Such confidence doesn't happen in a vacuum or blind faith but in the authority, power, and faithfulness of God who works out His purposes and plans, thus fulfilling His promises, as seen in the continuing words of the prayer found here:

^{4:25} ***you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit*** through our ancestor David, your servant, saying, 'Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? ²⁶ The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.'

The use of Ps. 2 reminds God's people this truth:

Opposition is expected; but the rebels' schemes are futile and foolish because God is using even their opposition to work out his agenda.

^{4:27} "In fact, ***this has happened here*** in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus

... ²⁸ ***But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will.***

The prayer thus far declares that the effort in pursuing God's agenda will never be wasted.

^{4:29} And now, O Lord ... ***give us ... great boldness*** in preaching your word. ³⁰ ***Stretch out your hand with healing power;*** may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus." ³¹ ***After this prayer,*** the meeting place ***shook***, and they were all ***filled with the Holy Spirit.*** Then they preached the word of God with ***boldness.***

Praying for boldness is based on ...

God's sovereignty demonstrated in the evil-crushing and life-restoring power of the resurrected Jesus;

its aim is not the absence of adversity or opposition but their faithful participation in the continuing of God's mission in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit.

The fundamental orientation of prayer is to align with the will of God and serve His kingdom agenda, so they act with confidence and authority as God's instruments, imitating the Jesus way and opening up to new ministry opportunities.

Len Sweet writes that “the twenty-first century may be the most dangerous century in human history ... what is most concerning is a syndrome best described as JDD (Jesus Deficit Disorder)—the disappearance of Christ from his church.”⁸

How then should we pray?

❖ ***“Lord, enable us [Cornerstone family] to become a force for good in our neighbourhood and beyond.”***

The practice of vibrant prayer continues to be the outstanding elements of community worship and outreach since the beginning of the early church.⁹

Cf. Three priorities in the coming years at Cornerstone:

- Connection and Community – Pray that Cornerstone would be a place where people can find community and belonging.
- Leadership Development Culture – Pray that God would raise up leaders with strong faith and Christ-like character – young & old – to advance His mission.

- Infrastructure – Pray that we will develop organizational effectiveness in helping people to draw closer to Jesus.
- Wisdom, clarity, and boldness to discern what would be the new iteration of Vision 2020.

Mike Frost has recently written an article, “*If Jesus Planted A Church, What Would It Look Like?*” and the conclusion is: “Here’s what the church that Jesus built looks like – a people who acknowledge him as their king, offering all of their lives under his authority, working on living out this constellation of values ... ***The church is the gathering of those who have joined together to bend their knee before Christ their king and who are being shaped into citizens of his realm.***” [Emphasis ours.]¹⁰

⁸ Len Sweet in *Red Skies: 10 Essential Conversations Exploring Our Future as the Church*, pp. 30, 33. 100 Movements Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁹ Acts 2:47, “all the while ***praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people.*** And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.” It’s instructive to read from *Didache* one of the most important early documents of the 2nd century, the manual of church life, in which the use of the Lord’s Prayer 3x/day is mentioned (8:2-3).

Alan Hirsch in Foreword of *Red Skies: 10 Essential Conversations Exploring Our Future as the Church*, p. 12, 100 Movements Publishing. Kindle Edition. “In and beyond all the apparent chaos of human history as it unfolds, the sovereign God is always at work, his purposes weaving their way throughout. The macrocosm (human society) is transformed through changes in the microcosm (the prefigurative society that is the church). The seeds of God’s future are being sown in and through the church ... ”

¹⁰ <https://mikefrost.net/if-jesus-planted-a-church-what-would-it-look-like/>



Let me bring to the close of this message by reminding all of you:

A growing church is a praying church.

A praying church is a growing church.