

WORD OF LIFE STUDY GUIDES

By John Paul Miller



Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

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Pastor John Paul Miller

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When God's People Pray

A Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Prayer
taught by Pastor John Miller

“The greatest fellowship in all the world is the fellowship of prayer. Church members need to pray together --- young converts as well as mature Christians, the men as well as the women, the officers as well as the regular members. The church leaders, like Peter and John, need to meet together for prayer. And certainly our families need to meet together for prayer. Something happens when churches pray because prayer produces a creative fellowship between church members and church officers and church families. And that kind of prayer fellowship changes lives to the glory of God.”

(Warren W. Wiersbe)

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THE BASIS FOR PRAYER

INTRODUCTION:

Acts 1:1-2, "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:"

The Acts of the Apostles is really the acts of Jesus Christ through His church and by His Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was on earth he "began both to do and teach" (vs. 1)

Now that He's gone back to Heaven He continues to **do** and **teach** through His body, the Church.

The incredible thing is that the first Christians accomplished so much with so very little.

Think of what so many churches depend on today to get the Lord's work done.

1. Organization
2. Trained Leadership

Notice the apostles were "unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13)

3. Finances

Peter said, "silver and gold have I none" (Acts 3:6).

4. Political Power
5. Buildings
6. Radio and Television

What was their secret?

The Word of God, the Spirit of God and prayer. They depended on the Spirit of God. They prayed before the throne of God, and they shared the Word of God.

The Book of acts contains at least thirty (30) references to prayer.

In the local church, prayer is just as important as preaching.

2 Timothy 3:5, “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”

The Book of Acts begins where the Gospels end – with the ascension.

Acts 1:9-11, “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 stedfastly 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.”

Everything that happens in the Book of Acts is based upon the ascension.

This is why Paul prayed, “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (Ephesians 1:18-23)

We will consider the ascension of Jesus Christ and how it relates to prayer and the church.

I. The Church’s Authority

Matthew 28:16-20, “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. “

Because Jesus is ascended He has all authority (vs. 18)

We should go to all Nations (vs. 19)

Teaching “all things” (vs. 20).

Jesus is with us “always”.

Because of the ascension we can pray with His authority!

II. The Church’s Ministry

Mark 16:19-20, “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.”

Notice it’s “the Lord working with them” (vs. 20).

1. Went forth
2. Preached
3. Signs

Our authority and the church’s ministry comes from the ascension.

We can minister to the entire world because we have an ascended Savior.

III. The Church’s Energy

Luke 24:49-53, “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.”

What were they waiting for? (vs. 53)

The Holy Spirit (vs. 49)

He’s our energy.

The Holy Spirit came because of the ascension.

A prayer meeting - Acts 1:14, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”

The church was praying because of Christ’s ascension; and the Holy Spirit came.

Thus, they went out with:

1. Authority
2. Ministry
3. Energy

Let's not neglect the wonderful resource God has given us of prayer.

And it's all based on Christ's ascension.

WHO SHOULD PRAY?

INTRODUCTION:

Acts 1:12-14, "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the 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 Zelotes, 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 brethren."

The first church meeting in the Book of Acts was a prayer meeting.,

There were one-hundred and twenty (120) people in the upper room.

Where were all the other Christians?

1 Corinthians 15:6, "After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep."

Five hundred (500) people saw Jesus!

This was only a nucleus of the church but they were doing the most important work: prayer!

Satan try's to keep us from prayer (Eph 6).

Our flesh doesn't like to pray.

Who Should Pray?

I. All Church Members Must Pray

Notice the variety of people involved in this prayer meeting.

1. Both men and women were there (vs. 14)

It's the same list of women who ministered to the Lord (Luke 8:2, 3).

2. The Apostles were also there (vs. 13)

3. Mary the mother of Jesus (vs. 14)

4. His Brethren (vs. 14)

James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; Jude)

Both mature Christians (the Apostles) and new converts (his brethren) were in the prayer meeting.

When churches pray it produces unity because Jesus Christ becomes the center of the fellowship.

Not the Pastor
Not the Program
Not the Building
Not the Budget

But the Lord Jesus Christ!

Notice verse 14: “with one accord”.

It’s a wonderful statement you find it at least five (5) times in the Book of Acts:

1. Here in Acts 1:14 – we have the one accord of “supplication”.
2. Acts 2:1 – the one accord of “anticipation”.
3. Acts 2:46 – the one accord of “continuation”.

No dropouts in the first church

4. Acts 4:24 – the one accord of “adoration”.
5. Acts 15:25 – the one accord of “determination”.

It all started in a prayer meeting!

Every Christian should belong to a local church and be involved in the prayer ministry of the church.

Church members ought to pray together.

II. All Church Leaders Must Pray

Acts 3:1, “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.”

Christians, yet they were still going to the Jewish temple to pray.

Is it wrong to have set places and set times to pray?

No!

Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane.

He also prayed in the morning and evening.

Psalms 55:17, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice."

Daniel had set hours for prayer:

Daniel 6:10, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

Nothing is wrong with set hours for prayer.

Throughout Acts the spiritual leaders were praying.

Acts 6:1-7, "And 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. Then the twelve called the 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 this 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 Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

Paul too was a praying Pastor.

Colossians 1:3, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,"

Colossians 1:9, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;"

Colossians 4:12, "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." (a lay leader)

Men fish, play baseball, drink coffee, together yet they don't pray together.

III. All Church Families Must Pray

Acts 21:5, "And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and 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."

Mothers & fathers setting examples of prayer to their children.

Prayer is necessary to protect the family.

"But", you might say, "We're very busy". Find time!

Warren W. Wiersbe, "The greatest fellowship in all the world is the fellowship of prayer. Church members need to pray together --- young converts as well as mature Christians, the men as well as the women, the officers as well as the regular members. The church leaders, like Peter and John, need to meet together for prayer. And certainly our families need to meet together for prayer. Something happens when churches pray because prayer produces a creative fellowship between church members and church officers and church families. And that kind of prayer fellowship changes lives to the glory of God."

THE WORD OF GOD AND PRAYER

INTRODUCTION:

Acts 6:1-7, “And 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. Then the twelve called the 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 this 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 Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

Key verse: “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” (vs. 4) – one that the church needs today.

We cannot separate the Word of God and Prayer. If we do, we will have problems.

Jesus said in John 15:7, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you [the Word], ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you [prayer].”

Warren W. Wiersbe, “As you go through the Bible, you will find that God’s tools for ministry are the Word of God and prayer. The Word of God gives us enlightenment. Prayer gives us enablement. When we read the Word of God, our faith is increased because faith comes through the Word of God. Then we pray, and God answers because our praying is guided by the Word of God.”

Illustrations:

Old Testament - Moses – go up the mountain to pray – bring God’s Word down to the people.

1 Samuel 12:23, “Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way.”

We are told in Daniel 9:2 that Daniel “understood by books the number of the years, concerning which the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, the prophet, that he {God} would accomplish seventy years in the desolations

of Jerusalem.” There is the Word of God. What did Daniel do? “And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes; and I prayed unto the Lord, my God” (vs. 3-4). The Word of God and prayer. Daniel did not simply study the Word of God . He also turned the Word of God into prayer.

New Testament – Mark 1:35-38

Our Lord Jesus Christ had this same balance in His ministry. “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there **prayed**. And Simon and they that were with him, followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek after thee. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns that I map **preach** there also’ for therefore came I forth.”

Jesus had a ministry of prayer and the Word of God. The two must be balanced. When we open the Bible, God speaks to us. When we open our hearts in prayer, we speak to God.

Why is the ministry of the Word of God and Prayer so important in our lives and in the church?

Because of the blessings it brings.

What are the blessings?

1. The Source of Our Wisdom

They prayed in the upper room before they elected a new apostle:

Acts 1:4, “And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.”

The problem with some churches today is they are run by the wisdom of this world instead of the wisdom of God.

Just because a person is a successful businessman doesn't mean he has the wisdom needed to direct the affairs of the church.

1 Corinthians 3:19, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.”

That doesn't mean that the church should not be run in a business like way. It simply means that the wisdom of this world is not sufficient for determining the will of God for the local church.

Where do we get this wisdom?

Through the Word of God and Prayer.

Warren W. Wiersbe, "If you are in a place of leadership in your church but you are not spending time in the Word of God or taking time to pray, you are not going to have much to contribute. You are going to be an obstacle instead of an asset. You are going to be a stumbling block instead of a stepping stone."

2. The Success of Our Witness

Acts 2

There was a prayer meeting

The Holy Spirit came

Peter Preached

3000 were saved

I can tell the difference in the preaching when I've prayed and others are praying for me.

Someone once asked Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great British Baptist preacher, what the secret of his ministry was. Quietly he replied, "My people pray for me."

Not only are the Word of God and prayer the source of our wisdom and the success of our witness, but they are also.

3. The Secret of Our Warfare

Acts 4:23-26, "And 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, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ."

They turned the Word of God into prayer

Illustrations:

New Testament:

Ephesians 6:17-18, “And take the helmet of salvation, and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God: **Praying always** with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”

We need both to defeat the devil.

Jesus tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1-13)

Old Testament:

When the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, they had a battle with the Amalekites. “Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed (Ex. 17:8-11). Here is another combination of the Word of God and prayer. The victory came, not because of one or the other but because of both. Moses could have been up on the mountain praying, but had there been no army on the field, there could have been no victory. On the other hand, Joshua and his soldiers could have been battling valiantly on the field, but had Moses not been on the mount praying, they could not have had the victory.

4. The Supply of Our Workers

Acts 13:1-3, “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and 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.”

Notice they were not called in a missions conference.

Perhaps He’s calling you?

5. The Strength of Our Walk

Acts 20:32, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

1. Prayer - “I commend you to God”
2. The Word of God - “the word of his grace”

Notice the result:

1. “build you up”
2. “give you an inheritance”

The combination of the Word of God and prayer is the secret of the church’s success for the Lord. It is the source of our wisdom, the success of our witness, the secret of our warfare, the supply of our workers, the strength of our walk. “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word” Acts 6:4”.

PRAYER AND CLOSED DOORS

INTRODUCTION:

If you knew that you were scheduled to be executed the next morning, would you sleep the night before?

Peter did.

What made the difference?

Prayer!

Prayer can open doors.

Prayer can overcome great problems.

Prayer can set people free.

Acts 12:1-5, "Now 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 the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter 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."

What if the story stopped at that point?

Acts 12:5b-7, ". . . but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, 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."

What a difference prayer makes.

Lessons:

In Acts 12, we see two (2) different powers at work:

1. The Power of Satan

Notice that Satan used Herod (vs. 1)

Why?

The church was on the move.

Satan hates the church.

Acts 2 - 3,000 saved

Acts 4 - 2,000 saved
5,000 saved

Satan is attacked!

1. as a Lion (Acts 4)
2. as a Serpent (Acts 5) – Ananias and Sapphira
 - a) persecution – outside
 - b) pollution – inside
- 3) as an accuser (Acts 6)
- 4) as a murder (Acts 12)

Remember Ephesians 6:12, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Also, 1 Peter 5:8, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”

How does God defeat the power of the devil?

By the Power of a praying church.

2. The Power of a Praying Church

Notice that Satan attacks spiritual leaders.

Why?

We should pray for them.

God’s power is released when God’s people pray.

Notice what the church did not do.

Notice what they did:

1. They prayed
2. How they prayed
 - a) without ceasing (vs. 5)

Same as Luke 22:44, “And being in an agony he prayed more **earnestly**: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane)

- b) together as a group (vs. 12)
 - c) they were praying specifically (for Peter)
 - d) they were praying persistently

God opened the prison doors.

The angel fetched Peter out of prison but it was prayer that fetched the angel.

What doors do you need God to open?

1 Peter 3:12, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”

God see’s our trials.

God hears our prayers.