

Extended Hands

Relationships and Communication

Marriages.

The disciples could have asked Jesus anything, but they asked Him how He prays. They saw in Him something different. When Jesus prayed.....He connected. He was engaged in deep communication from the heart.

We too want to learn how to pray like that. Every great relationship has great communication. It starts with hearts desperate to connect.

Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Life "Its not about you"

Our sin nature drives our selfishness. We live our lives as if everything is about us. Often our prayer life reflects that selfishness...God watch over ME...Keep ME healthy....Give ME financial resources....Open this door for ME....Lord help MY house to sell....God please protect ME...God give ME that promotion...Give ME safe travel... Lord please help MY team today in the big game...

Sometimes my prayers are all about ME...never mentioning anyone else or if I do mention someone else, It is usually a close family member or friend where if something happened to them.....It would impact...ME.... I am guessing that I am not alone here. I believe that if we were all honest. I believe that those of us who do pray....is much smaller than those who say they pray....and those who truly pray often,tend to pray very selfish prayers

But those First Christ Followers prayed differently. Their prayers were selfless. They connected through two key human needs and feelings: Touch and Hunger.

Their prayers were selfless. They made sure the person they prayed for was physically touched- a basic human need. They laid hands on them and prayed for them. Second, they made sure their hearts were desperate for God by depriving themselves of food- a basic human need- They fasted and prayed for them

They modelled selflessness. They fasted to prepare their hearts and laid hands on others to extend their hearts. It is a powerful combo of selfless prayers...Praying people are burdened for others

We want to become a praying church....A selfless church that makes sacrifices to give others what they truly need. ...A church that meets the spiritual needs of others before our own physical needs ...A church desperate for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit....A church where prayer is the first response and not the last resort...In other

words...a church that authentically represents the Jesus we claim to follow and a church that depends upon Him for everything.

Extended Hands

There were times in the book of Acts when they laid hands on those they prayed for... Why did they do that?....Well....They had seen Jesus do it

Jesus extended His hands to others. Jesus knew that touch is a basic human need. As a society we are guarded about touching....between our fears of inappropriate touching and our germophobia and recent fear of things like Covid, we have become disconnected from others.

But we were wired to touch and be touched. There is healing in the human touch. We express deep emotions through touch that can't be expressed any other way. The hunger for touch is as strong as our hunger for food. Our skin is intensely responsive to physical touch. But please hear me before we go any further, my comments here relate to appropriate touching

Touch is a God-given need that we never outgrow.

It can indicate empathy, approval, affirmation, love, and friendship. Touch is a transmission from one person to another and it always communicates something...Our hands are an extension of our heart.

When our heart and hands work together... We can touch another person's heart...We can reach out and touch someone deeply...and in the process we are touched equally. Both are benefited

As adults we continue to have a need to be touched. It affects us physiologically and biochemically. Brainwave activity is increased. Alertness is increased....Insulin needs are reduced in Diabetics.Hormone levels are increased....sleep patterns are improved. Touch is physically necessary and beneficial to our sense of well being. Simply put....humans thrive on touch

And Jesus knew it...He put that desire in us.

Matthew 19:13–15 (ESV) 13 Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, 14 but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." 15 And he laid his hands on them and went away.

Matthew 8:1–3 (ESV) 8 When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. 2 And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." 3 And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Jesus extended His hands to touch.....a leper....A leper! No one touched a leper....no one. Jesus touched a leper..The great crowd that probably stepped way back when the leper showed up...must have collectively gasped. No one touches

a Leper. They are unclean....they make you unclean. More importantly, a rabbi....a man of God never touched anything unclean.

The leper had likely not been touched by anyone....for years. Can you imagine that? To never feel the touch of someone else. No handshake...No pat on the back...no hug...no one putting their arm around you. We were created to be touched...to be touched by God...and to Touch others

Jesus didn't have to touch the Leper to heal him. He could have spoken....noddled...or just decided...the healing would have happened. Yet Jesus often went out of His way to touch those no one would touch....touch those who most needed it.

When Jesus stretched out His hand...He was stretching out His heart...and His followers did the same. They saw Jesus do it...so they did it.

They extended their hands to others to provide support and comfort...To allow someone to feel the presence of another person in the battle with them...To symbolize a touch from God as a sign of confirmation of what God is doing...As a show of unity of those adopted into God's family....Frequently we read that they laid hands on them and prayed for them. Lets look at Acts 9

In Acts 9 Jesus sent Ananias to pray for Saul...Saul had a conversion experience when he met Jesus on the Road to Damascus. **MAP** ..He had been persecuting Christians and Jesus asked him "Why are you persecuting me?" Saul was spiritually blind and now because of his encounter with Jesus, was physically blind.

One of the men Saul was going to go persecute was Ananias who lived in Damascus. In a vision God told Ananias to find Saul of Tarsus...Not too hard. Everyone had heard about Saul. I suspect Ananias knew he was coming to Damascus....Probably heard rumors- like the sheriff heard of the gunslinger coming. Ananias was probaby hiding from Saul.

But then once again God shakes things up. Instead of telling Ananias how to avoid Saul, God tells him to go to Saul and lay hands on him so he would receive his sight. No doubt when Saul could clearly see....the first person he would see is Ananias.....I am sure Ananias wasn't real thrilled with that idea. Yet God often calls us to obedience outside of our comfort zone.

Like we have talked about for months, the incredible things of God lay right outside of your comfort zone. Ananias was about to see the miraculous because he was in that place, when he had to depend upon God.

Acts 9:17–18 (ESV) 17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;

Saul...soon to be Paul.....was a believer. Ananias witnessed what was probably the greatest spiritual conversion ever. He was obedient...He was uncomfortable....He was scared...but now He had seen the miraculous of God. He had forever stretch his comfort zone.

One thing I have not mentioned is that God increases and expands your comfort zone with every experience. When you trust God and step beyond your comfort and safety zone...God redefines what is comfortable for you.

Maturing believers are always expanding their comfort zone. What made them uncomfortable early in their walk is well with in their comfort zone now. What makes them uncomfortable today will be in their comfort zone tomorrow....unless...they shrink back

Ananias laid hands on Saul. Ananias was participating in the work God was doing. Now think about this for a moment.....God could have just given Saul his sight back. He could have saved Ananias some gas money....But there is something about the laying on of hands....Something about combining physical touch and prayer that connects the two parties to each other, to God, and to what God is doing.

The work of Jesus was flowing through Him to Saul. This prayer was not about Ananias...it was about what Jesus was doing for Saul. Ananias by laying His hands on Saul was symbolically representing a touch from God...By extending His hands He was acknowledging that what was to happen was not of him but rather of God. He was just the messenger....The Holy Spirit moved through Him to Saul. The gift of Healing flowed from God's heart on the throne in heaven....through the heart and hands of Ananias...and touched the heart and now Spirit of Saul.

Prayer accompanied by a physical touch...touches the heart. It takes our attention away from our selfish prayers and puts the attention on someone else. But in the process both parties are changed both are drawn into what God is doing.

But sometimes in the Early Church praying for others...even with Hands Extended...seemed to lack something. Sometimes...the heart of the one who was praying for others...had to become more desperate for God...They needed to physically feel their desperation for God to intercede.

Let's see if we can pick it up.

2 Samuel 12:16 David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground.

Daniel 9:3-5 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God

Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church. With prayer and fasting, they turned the elders over to the care of the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

Acts 13:2-4 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.

Nehemiah 1:4 When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

Luke 2:37 Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer.

Jesus speaking to the disciples about their failure to cast out a demon....Matthew 17:20-21 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

They Fasted....and Prayed.

There is no such thing as a fast without prayer. A fast without prayer is just going hungry and you're accomplishing nothing at all. While fasting is not necessary for salvation it is essential on your Christian walk of faith and highly recommended. In fact, Jesus expects us to fast.

Matthew 6:17-18 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Fasting will help you have a more intimate relationship with Christ. It will help you to overcome sin, bad habits, and help open your eyes to things that are displeasing to God in your life. Fasting and prayer is a time to separate yourself from your regular patterns and from things of the world and come closer to the Lord.

Fasting restrains our physical pleasure, but it enhances our spiritual pleasure.

Fasting reduces the influence of our self-will and invites the Holy Spirit to do more intense work in us.

Fasting is abstaining from food with a spiritual goal in mind.

I love this thought.....Fasting, at its root, is a physical hunger...that connects us to our spiritual homesickness for God."

They gave up their selfish desires....even the desire for food...to remind themselves that all they really neededIt is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives... How did they know to do that?

They learned this from Jesus too

They lived so simply. If Jesus did it...we will do it. I wish we could live like that today. Sort of that WWJD idea. I would change it to **DWJD**. Do what Jesus did. Knowing what He would do and doing what He did are two very different things. DWJD commits us to action...rather than thought.

Jesus Fasted

Jesus fasted for 40 days in the Desert. Satan came to tempt Him. Satan thought he could win because Jesus was physically weak but Jesus was Spiritually strong. Fasting may weaken us physically but it builds Spiritual strength

Jesus not only fasted...He expected His followers would too

Matthew 6:16–18 (ESV) Fasting 16 "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Did you notice what was repeated in this passage? When you fast.....Not if...not perhaps...not those few who decide to....Jesus expected His followers to fast and He repeated it for emphasis

Do you see what else is repeated? Reward....the promise. Your Father WILL reward you. Anytime you see that promise....Do what it says to do!

So why don't we? Why is this a lost discipline?

Either we don't fast or we are doing a great job of being obedient. Jesus said to keep it between us and God, so maybe we are all just really obedient and I am the one who is struggling.

I suspect however that right now...like me...you are bit convicted in this area. Or maybe this is the first time you have really heard anyone teach about it. I have been thinking a lot about why we don't...well let me say why I don't fast as often as I should.

It took a lot of self exploration. I have thought about this topic a lot....mull'd it over and over....tried to understand why this discipline is so hard for me. And after years of exploration...I have an answer now.... I know now why I don't fast like I should.....

I DON'T LIKE IT

I like Food. I need food. I want food and I am very good at finding food.

Fasting reveals my lack of discipline. It is through fasting, that I understand how strong my desire can be for food. I am convicted because my drive for Jesus doesn't seem to match or come close to resolving my drive for hunger....and I guess that is the point

Let me boil this down for us....How easy is it for you to go through a day and not find time for Jesus? How easy is it for you to go through a day and not find time for Food?

Christ followers fast in order to develop selfless hearts. When we fast we reveal a need....We create a void.....God can use that void to do a work in our hearts.... Every hunger pain drives us back toward God and reminds us that we are dependent upon Him

If you are spiritually stuck in an area of your life I challenge you to fast and pray. There is something about fasting that leads to spiritual breakthroughs

Through fasting we surrender to God

Pastor Jim Cymbala said it this way. "I have discovered an astonishing truth. God is attracted to weakness. He can't seem to resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need Him."

Fasting it seems moves our heart....and seems to move the Heart of God....to the same place and action.

Fasting helps us to recognize our desperation for God. Fasting was common place in the First Church and seemingly absent in today's church.

The first century church was selfless....Today's church is often selfish.....Look at the early church in Antioch. At a critical time in the history of the church they demonstrated selflessness. They fasted to prepare their hearts and laid hands on others to extend their hearts

Acts 12:24–13:3 (ESV) 24 But the word of God increased and multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

The Early Christ Followers began to have success. King Herod had just died. They were beginning to see Revival. The Holy Spirit was working through them and around them. The Gospel was not only increasing...it was multiplying. Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem. They had completed their service and their stories were amazing. Mission well done Paul and Barnabas.

They were at a critical point in the mission....Do you know what keeps people from seeing GREAT things of God?

Getting comfortable with GOOD things of God

Resting when the mission is just starting. Living in desperate times but not being desperate for God. My biggest concern for our church is that we would get comfortable. That we would be the church that starts out hot...but becomes luke warm. Growing a church is easy...everyone is on board...inviting, serving, doing whatever it takes....But at some point...you realize you aren't starting a church anymore...you have become one.

You are no longer building...just are maintaining a building. You start to guard what you have done...Keeping what you have built becomes more important than the reason you built it. Before you know it, you have drifted away from the mission of reaching others. The church has become about you and me and our comfort rather than those we know who are destined for Hell.

I never want anyone to have to write what Jesus told John to write about Sardis..

Revelation 3:15–17 (ESV) 15 “ ‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.’”

Every day...the Pastors and Elders put this church up on the altar. Remnant is a living sacrifice....God can sacrifice us for the mission....Maintaining this Church is not our mission....Surrendering Remnant to the Holy Spirit to be used for the mission....is our mission.

Consumer or Contributor?

How do you know if you are luke warm? Ask yourself this question...

When it comes to the mission of God....**am I a consumer or contributor?**

Lets just take our approach to this church as an example....Consumer or Contributor?

When you come to church as a consumer...You are more concerned about how we do church...what the church can do for you... and what you can get from the church

When you come to church as a contributor, you are more concerned about Being the Church, reaching others, and playing your part in the mission....focused on what you can contribute and sacrifice for the mission

As a consumer...Church fits in when it is convenient... As a contributor...Church fits in because it is necessary

People tell me they will miss church because of football games, parades, the fair, their kids sports...and then say "you understand we will watch online" No I don't understand....not at all.

Sure we are all out of town at times..I get that. We are all sick at times....I know that But some do church as if it is an option knowing that they can catch the replay and highlights on line...Like we watch Sportcenter or the News

I still can't believe that churches closed during Covid....it makes no sense to me and as you know I believe doing so contradicts Scripture. Because the American Church closed for essentially almost a year...the damage to the Gospel will take years to heal.

You CANT DO CHURCH ONLINE...NOT DURING COVID...NOT NOW...NOT EVER

But let me tell you what you cannot do online. You can't.... 1. Welcome Guests 2. See those who are hurting 3. Lift your voice with others in praise for Jesus 4. Take communion with your church family 5. Feel the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit in the room 6. Experience the community of being with other believers 7. You can't serve others 8. You can't be used by God to minister to others 9. You can't reach out and touch....anyone. 10. You can't feel the touch...of anyone.

But there is something even greater that you will miss.

Let's look at the First Church

Acts 2:42-44 (ESV) 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

They devoted themselves...do you see the list? They devoted themselves...they made these things more important than all else. They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching....they devoted themselves to fellowship....they devoted themselves to breaking bread...they devoted themselves to the prayers....they Devoted Themselves and look at what happens next.

Acts 2:42-44 (ESV) 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

AWE CAME UPON EVERY...EVERY...SOUL

Man...I want Remnant to live in that place! They lived in awe and wonder....when is the last time you felt the awe and wonder of God? Awe came upon EVERY Soul. They saw wonders and signs...all who were there....all who believed were there TOGETHER

ALL who believed were together...Let that sink in for a moment. All who believed prioritized being there. They were not only there in person....they were there spiritually...they were there....and they weredevoted to the most important thing...and because of that....they all together experienced the awe of God.

And I know that is not likely to happen...at the fair....watching football...sleeping in or watching us online. Do you know why the early church saw and experienced the GREAT things of God? They never got comfortable with GOOD....They sacrificed and devoted themselves...they positioned themselves to be desperate for God's very best. So they were together....in church and together they experience the awe of God.

I know how hard it is to work all week and spend part of your weekend here.

I am bivocational...I understand the pressures and I understand the evil one who is trying to pressure you to be somewhere else. The evil one who will do anything to keep you from experiencing the awe of God. That is why you must devote yourself to be here.

I know that there are competing interests out there. I have pulled my kids out of their games at halftime and walked away from stunned coaches who didn't believe I was serious when I told them before the game started that our family would not miss church for a sporting event. We didn't have Sunday services back then...It is easier now...

Surrender the decision of where you are to be...to Christ 1. Before you set your agenda for the weekends...pray 2. Ask God where He wants you and your family to be The First church devoted themselves to being together and they experience the Awe of God. And once that happened, there was no where else....to be. They were having early success in Jerusalem...let's see how they responded.

Acts 13:1-2(ESV) 13 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting

Lists are always important in the Bible. Look at the list of those assembled

Manaen - A life Long Friend of Herod?

Herod had John the Baptist and Jesus Killed....And Saul- Saul helped to have Stephen Killed. Only God could assemble such a group because these were people with transformed lives

The response from a transformed heart...is worship. They were celebrating..not what they had done...but what God had done. They were Worshiping the Lord and enjoying the experiences of what God had done in Jerusalem Thanking Him for His presence and power....Thanking Him for using them to move the mission forward....There were stories to tell...coming back together to build each other up....It was a pep rally for God

But these people lived Present Forward...In the Present...but being pulled by the anchor that is their future.

the mission was not over...it had just begun. They celebrated their victory, but with an awareness of bigger challenges to come.

So they worshiped and fasted. People on a God sized mission are desperate for God's presence and power. Jesus said to go to Jerusalem, Samaria, Judea and the ends of the Earth. They had a good start in Jerusalem...but there was too much work to do. They continued to seek God's presence and His power. More desperate for more of the Holy Spirit than ever before. Why did they fast? They fasted to keep themselves from becoming luke warm.

They had experienced God working through them and realized they needed more of Him. You move and we want more...You speak and we want more...They fasted because they wanted to place their need for God ahead of everything else in their lives including their need for food

They were desperate for God.....Worship reminded them of His presence.....Fasting reminded them of their need for Him

Acts 13:2(ESV) 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

At this critical moment...hot or luke warm...they fasted and prayed. It would have been easy to get comfortable. Easy to pride up and maintain what they had built...but they were desperate for the direction and guidance of God. Once again asking...What are we to do now? While waiting...praying...and fasting.....the Holy Spirit once again revealed to them what is to be next

The Holy Spirit gave them direction. They shared in what God was doing. Through the Holy Spirit they shared the burden that Barnabas and Saul must have felt. To be called by God is a burden..you feel the weight of it...you know you are unworthy...you know you need God.To have your leader called away is a burden...you realize your need for God. Since they were in unity...they all felt and shared that burden together.

Acts 13:3 (ESV) 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Note the order

They fasted to prepare their hearts and laid hands on others to extend their hearts

Once all of their hearts were collectively in unity....Once they were a praying people and a fasting people.....Then they symbolically collected all of their love, desires, desperation and hopes and extended their hands to Barnabas and Paul. By laying on of hands they were telling them. You may be called out...but you go on no mission of God alone. We are there with you....Supporting you in prayer...Feel our hands on your backs....The burden of the mission may weigh on you but know that you are not carrying that weight alone.

They laid their hands on them. Affirming and agreeing with what God has done. Not elevating the person...but the God who has chosen that person....Entrusting them to the One who called them. Sending them to help complete the mission

Years ago when I was ordained....the church laid hands on me...It took me back to a baseball game when I was 12 years old.

I was a good pitcher..not great...things were not going real well...I was nervous...it was a big game...I probably should have been pulled, but I had a great coach. Mr Stockdale

He had me turn around and look at my team...He put his arm on my shoulders...He had a big arm...I remember the feeling...When that arm touched me, it was...I have your back.... I want you to feel that I am in this with you. Then he whispered to me...The ball is in your hand...but it is not your ball...everyone here wants to play with it. This is a game.... you don't win it or lose it on your own

All of us are in this together. These other 8 people are actually hoping that you will let him hit it. They want to use their skills and talents..they are here just to back you up...Whatever you can't do...they will cover for you. That is why you are on a team and not out here by yourself.

So I want you to stop trying to throw a strike. Throw a ball he can hit and it will be a strike....Stop trying to do this by yourself....You need to trust your team to help you....Do your best and let them take care of the rest.

Then he took his arm off of my shoulder and walked away and all the weight of the situation was lifted... I knew coach Stockdale was with me...even if he wasn't actually with me. I knew my team would back me up.

That night last year and since then when you laid hands on me. It was as if I could feel the weight of Jesus' arm on my shoulder...His touch. Telling me how He was in this with us...with me. Reminding me of how great you were...of how we are on mission together...to do my best and let you do the rest.

I am by no means a great pastor...but I have the greatest coach...and He has put me on an amazing team. My role...the ball in my hand...is to follow Jesus...and lead and challenge all of us to do the same. When you laid hands on me...you extended your hearts...to all God to touch mine.

Every time I begin to feel unworthy or inadequate I remember that touch....Because I AM unworthy and I AM inadequate....God had you lay hands on me....Not only to remind me of my inadequacy...But to keep me there and to remind me that we are all a team

We are all on the team....each playing our part....the ball has been given to us, but it is not ours to own or hold on to. Our performance doesn't really matter. What we forget is that the game has already been won. What is happening is much greater than how well we perform.

The game so much bigger than us. The only thing that matters is our relationship with Coach. He is the reason we are even on the field. Imagine knowing He is right there with us, but we never speak to Him. Yeah me neither. Let's Pray

And When You Pray Week 1 "Hands Extended"
Frank Burns MDiv

October 24, 2021
Remnant Church of Sarasota