

EYES OPEN

Introduction

It is a series that I have wanted to do for some time about Prayer...We are all wired to connect to God..We were created to talk with Him. Praying is simply talking to God.....So I thought it might be interesting to learn how to pray from those who really talked to God. The Disciples walked and talked to God...Jesus...for 3 years. Then He was taken up to heaven and they were moved to continue the conversation in prayer. When I read through the Book of Acts.....The Story of the First Christ Followers and the Early Church. I am challenged by the way they prayed

Prayer was their first response because they were desperate to hear from God. They wanted nothing more than to talk to God. What is it that made them a praying church? They were desperate for the presence and power of God. They had been in constant communication with Jesus and now He is in heaven. So they continued that conversation with the Holy Spirit. Over the next few weeks I want to look at the Book of Acts through the lens of prayer

Because I think for many of us...if we were honest....Prayer is not our first response...it is our last resort. We will read books, talk to counselors, get advice from friends, search the internet.....But when asked have you prayed?..... Well yeah I guess. But for those in the First Century, prayer was their first response.

Acts 1:13–14 (ESV) 14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

They joined together constantly...Praying churches pray...CONSTANTLY....It is this word that separates a church that prays from a praying church. It separates a person who prays from a praying person. Many people if pressed would say they pray....but are you a praying person?

I want us to be a praying people....I want prayer to be our first response. I want Remnant to be a praying church....not just a church that prays

But it is hard for a lot of us because of our past

We have learned some things about prayer over the years that are not accurate.....And we need to rethink our prayer life....We have to unlearn some things about prayer

That there is a right time to pray...We need to unlearn that. Maybe for you it was before meals and at bedtime. Or maybe for you prayer time is in the morning. Another thing we need to unlearn

That there is a way to pray. A lot of us have been taught "the position" Bow your head...and....close your eyes. One problem...I can't find that in the Bible. Bow in reverence..yes...Eyes closed....can't find it.

We may have been taught that there is a time to pray and a way to pray. We have created this box and shoved prayer into it. This is how you pray...but we did not get this from Scripture. Sure it is fine to pray before meals and at bedtime. Sure it is fine to bow

your head....But I believe that God wanted so much more for us to experience in our prayer life and the first century Christ followers modeled it for us. They prayed with their eyes open.

I titled this message "Eyes Open" I want us to see that our prayer with God is not just a time where we bow our heads and close our eyes. But that we have a consistent and ongoing conversation with God during the day....Where we see things and then speak and listen to Him as we go about our day.

My prayer is that we will explore prayer outside of the box...Let's see what we can learn from those who walked with Jesus.

Please turn with me to the Acts 1:8

Acts 1:8 (ESV) 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

I suspect that the disciples were thinking.....Jesus is going to give us power...Great He has done that before He gave us power over demons and diseases before he sent us out in pairs.... Jesus has sent them out before,,,Well not to the end of the earth...But He is probably just exaggerating...Ok we will be going with Jesus outside of Jerusalem...Judea is probably doable....but Samaria? To the ends of the Earth?

Well Jesus if that is where you want to take us...Sure we will go with you....to the ends of the earth....Ok Jesus lead us wherever you want us to go. We said we would follow you anywhere...You lead...we are all in.

Acts 1:9 (ESV) 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

OK Time Out. Where is He going? When is He coming back? We have a trip to take, He was going to take us around the World. We need Him. He was going to take us to the end of the earth. Jesus says...essentially...."See Ya" or "Im out"

They had been given a massive task.. They were under resourced... Poorly equipped...Not that well educated...No real political connections...Not well financed...Not even a good plan...Almost no influence...anywhere....Not even real sure where the end of the earth is and their leader...the one that has all the answers...has launched.

Acts 1:10–11 (ESV) 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?"

It seems to me that angels at times are hilarious...We read how they pop into someone's life....totally freak them out...dazzle them with brilliant light...and then make less than brilliant statements. Usually something like...."Fear Not."...Too late.

This question may be the best yet. Men of Galilee...why do you stand looking into heaven? Now the Bible does not tell us how they answered....but I think it went something like this...

What do you mean why are we looking into the sky? Jesus just disappeared..He like flew up to the clouds. He said He would be with us always...and yet He just launched We said we would follow Him anywhere...but now He is not here. He just gave us an impossible task....a God sized task.

He didn't give us instructions...He didn't give us advice...He didn't tell us how we should do it..He just said to do it. We have been following Him for 3 years..He always knew what to do....He decided where we go..when we go.. and what we are to do. He was not of this world...He had a connection with the Father... He came back from death...He can overcome anything....We need Him...we can't do this without Him.

I don't know..maybe Mr Angel we are looking into the sky...because we Need HIM!! We want to be with Him. For 3 long days...we thought we would never see Him again. We thought we had let Him down. Then He comes back from the Dead...We thought we would never be alone. He is Immanuel...God with us. And he just left us.

He said 1. **Matthew 28:20 (ESV) 20 And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

So Mr Angel...It is not the end of the age...and He is not here. We have been entrusted with the most important message ever. We have no idea how to do this and now our leader has done this sky diving rewind thing. I am staring at the sky because I can't believe what has just happened. That is why I am looking at the sky....You see I am just a little bit freaked out right now.And you Mr Angel are not helping.

Acts 1:11 (ESV) 11 This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Great...that is the problem....He is not...With us... When is He coming back? I wonder how long they stayed on that mountainStaring into the sky (pause).....Before they decided to leave. Before they took the first steps of their God-sized mission.... Without it seems...their God.

Imagine walking away from that experience....They had spent almost every minute of every day with Jesus... they were constantly aware of His presence in their lives Jesus was always there to show them wisdom. To show them love. To provide food...to calm the storms....To guard them from demons,,,To tell them where to go and when to do so

They had learned to live in His presence and now it seemed He was no longer.....Present. They love Him and now He was Gone...again... They had to be wondering...What do we do now? What, God, am I suppose to do now?....Jesus had anticipated that question and already answered it for them

Acts 1:4–5 (ESV) 4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Interesting that the words Jesus told them was not to go...but rather to wait...Jesus told the disciples that they must wait. They needed to be baptized with the Holy Spirit... Like

all the Christ Followers..they had been baptized with Water.... But Jesus tells them that they would soon be baptized with the Spirit and He promises them that it would be not many days from now.This baptism of the Holy Spirit would bring them power.

Acts 1:8 (ESV) 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Did you notice that this is a future tense? A future certainty...You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you....THEN you will be my witnesses. Don't miss this..It is only after they received the Holy Spirit that they become witnesses for Him. Once they receive that power...the power of God...they will be equipped to participate in this God-sized Mission....In the meantime...wait.....

God what am I to do now? Wait....Uggh...I hate to wait! I bet this particularly bugged Peter...he was so impulsive...Ok I know you want me to wait...but what am I suppose to do....while I am waiting? .What am I supposed to do NOW...There is only one answer to that question and it is always...

Pray!

Pray...sure....ok...but I need to do something! Praying IS doing something...In fact unless God has told us to do something else...Prayer is the ONLY thing we are to do

The disciples were desperate to be in the presence of Jesus...They were desperate to receive the power of Jesus...That desperation drove them to pray....lets pick up the story.

Acts 1:12–14 (ESV) 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. 13 And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying,

So they return to Jerusalem...to the upper room....again. The disciples find themselves back at Square One...back in the upper room....Despondent. Confused...and Desperate for answers...Abandoned it seemed by their leader. Not understanding what Jesus was doing....AGAIN.... It was only 40 days ago that Jesus was crucified and resurrected...Now they are headed back to the upper room...desperate to be in His presence

They are all there together. Likely all asking the same question...What am I supposed to do now? What are we supposed to do now?But these men had been trained by Jesus...He spent three years modeling for them...What to do when you are separated from God

How do you stay in the presence of Jesus? By connecting in prayer...and that is exactly what they were desperate to do.

Acts 1:14 (ESV) 14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

They were all in one accord...not a Honda...They were in unity....Not only were they praying...they were praying for the same thing. It does not say...they just prayed. It says...they devoted themselves to prayer....Jesus we need you....We desperately need to be in your

presence...We desperately need your guidance... We can't do this without you...Please Jesus help us!

They devoted themselves...because...and this is what separates them from us...They were truly desperate for the presence and power of God.

The early church followers when faced with uncertainty, confusion, frustration, and fear....Devoted themselves to prayer...How long do you suppose they prayed? A few hours? Maybe a long prayer meeting? Perhaps an all nighter? Did they come back the next Sabbath and pray again the next week? Jesus said that He would send this helper Spirit in "not so many days" How long is that? How long would you wait? Let's keep reading

Acts 2:1–4 (ESV) 2 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

OK lets get this timeline straight. Jesus was crucified on the Passover.

Acts 1:3 (ESV) 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

So he Ascended to Heaven 40 days after Passover

Now we are told it is the Day of Pentecost. People sometimes freak out when they hear the word Pentecost. Do you know what Pentecost means? It literally means 5 TENS...Pentecost just means 5 tens....Pentecost occurs 50 days after Passover.

I know this is like one of those math problems...If Jesus died and resurrected at Passover...And Jesus Ascended on day 40...And The Holy Spirit descended on day 50 And the upper room was one Sabbath Day's walk...How long did the Disciples pray in the upper room? Roughly 9 days.

They devoted themselves to prayer for 9-10 days... Sometimes I pray for an hour and get frustrated that my genie God hasn't done anything...They made prayer the most important thing in their lives for 10 days. Why? Because they were desperate... They prayed because they had to...they were desperate.

Did you notice that they prayed with their eyes open?

They saw tongues of Fire appear to each of them and rested on them. I don't think that was a vision but rather exactly what they saw. They were praying...the wind started blowing....and they saw tongues of Fire....As the Holy Spirit descended upon them and they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. And they began to speak in tongues as The Holy Spirit gave them utterance.

Ok so their eyes were open....No doubt that when the wind started blowing they were checking it out. They saw what was happening around them their eyes were open to see what

God was doing....No you see...their eyes were open....Not just physically but spiritually...Their eyes were open to Spiritual things...Their eyes were opened to see what God was doing.

They were expecting the promises of Jesus to come true. They were not just hoping something might happen...But..hear this...they expected the promised of God to actually happen...They expected to be in the Presence of Jesus...again...They expected to receive the Holy Spirit...They expected to be empowered from on high...It was not a matter of if...but rather when. Jesus said it...Jesus promised so of course....They believed it

They prayed in faith and in anticipation....They knew God would respond...They knew they needed God to respond...They were desperate and for the presence and power of God...They were not just praying with their minds....they were praying from their heart...They expected God to do something....and their eyes were physically and spiritually open to it.

Everything in their lives depended upon it. They had just been given an impossible task...Their leader has jettisoned into the sky... But Jesus told them they would receive power.

So this is a key difference between the way they prayed and the way we pray.

They prayed with their eyes open....They prayed with their Spiritual Eyes open and expecting to see God move. When they prayed they were open to see what God would do.

We often pray with our spiritual eyes closed. We doubt the promises of Jesus....we don't expect Him to act....we hope He will...but we don't persist in prayer until He answers.

They prayed...Full of faith and anticipation...They positioned themselves to be baptized in the Holy Spirit....The Holy Spirit descended upon them.....they spoke in tongues....They praised God in languages that were not their own...They glorified God in tongues..In languages those around them could understand.

When they received the Holy Spirit they were transformed and equipped to become a powerful force in the hands of an almighty God.They left the upper room that night....like a football team leaves their locker room ready to conquer the world. And that is exactly what they did. They prayed...the Holy Spirit was poured out on them....and revival broke out The flames descended upon them that night And they became a force to be reckoned with...Jesus kept His promise to them

And because Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit...They would never again have to live...Separated from the presence of God...Because God was now IN them.

So what made the First Christians a praying people? What makes them pray with their eyes open?

They were in desperate circumstances and desperation drives prayer

Does that surprise you? When you look over your life and you had seasons of praying constantly...What were the circumstances? It was probably not a good season of life...It was probably a time when you were desperate and realized how badly you needed God.

Desperate times....lead to desperate prayers.

When we need God's help...we will pray But the thing is...we ALWAYS need God's help...We are always dependent upon God we just don't always recognize it. You see our times ARE desperate....but we are not.

The First Christians were a praying people Because they had a constant awareness of their need for God and they knew that to accomplish what God wanted..They needed more of Him every day.

So why aren't we desperate?

The mission that they started has been handed to us. The words Jesus spoke to them...have been spoken to us. The task is just a God-Sized today as it was back then. The same Holy Spirit that descended upon them has descended upon us. The same power given to them...has been given to us.

They prayed with their eyes physically and spiritually open. They had a hard time keeping their eyes shut when they prayed because they knew God was going to respond...They didn't want to miss what God was going to do.

Is that where you are? Are you so overwhelmed by the mission we have been given...So desperate to be in the presence of Jesus...So desperate for the promised power of the Holy Spirit and so sure God is going to do something supernatural....That you are too excited to pray with your eyes closed?

Our eyes are open. We are praying in anticipation for what God has promised to do... Lifting our voices in unity....devoting ourselves to praying...for revival. For the Holy Spirit of God to be poured out on us and our community.We too become desperate for the presence and power of God in our lives.And when our eyes are truly opened....three things happen.

1. We see God clearly

We understand the promises of God...Once we embrace that God is who He says He is and He will do what He says He will do. We see God clearly...All powerful...All knowing...Always Present... Personally engaged....leading a mission....Equipping us....giving us power....Living in us....Living through us....and accomplishing His mission with us...Having already guaranteed victory.

When we begin praying with our eyes open...We expect to be in the Presence of God...We expect to receive the power of God- The Holy Spirit...And We expect to complete the mission of God. When our prayer life embraces those expectations....Our eyes are open because we can't wait to see what God is going to do

2. We see ourselves clearly

A bunch of sinful, messed up, misfits... Entrusted to carry on a God sized Mission...An impossible task...A God sized task...but with our eyes open....We see that we are not God...but we desperately need Him...We surrender ourselves to God's purposes.

We give to Jesus all that we have...We have become living sacrifices ...Daily laying down our lives as a form of worship...For whatever purpose God determines is best. We become desperate for the presence of God in our lives. So with our eyes open...we see God more clearly...we see ourselves more clearly and....

3. We see the World more clearly

Everything we see should drive us to pray....A beautiful sunset, ocean waves, waterfalls, still lakes, mountains- Thank You God those are amazing....A car wreck on the freeway- Please God Help them....Our friends and family- thank you God for people who love me....A football game- thank you God for smiting those heathens who play against your team, the Mighty Texas Longhorns. We were Wired to Connect with God...all the time...about everything.

Many of us go through our prayer lives like this (Put on blindfold). Hurting coworker, Homeless, Hurting, Lost, Hungry, Sick... But if we will have the courage to take off the blindfold....our eyes will be opened....We pray with our eyes open to all that is going on around us... And all that God is doing through us

And when we choose to pray like those in Acts 1. We see God more clearly 2. We see Ourselves more clearly 3. And we see our World more clearly Our eyes are opened in anticipation because we know God is about to do something God-sized

Is that where you are today? That same promise Jesus gave His Disciples is true for you...and for me...Are you praying and anticipating...that God will do what He said He would do? Are you expecting an outpouring of the Holy Spirit over your life? To give you power...to bring revival to your own life? Are you expecting an outpouring of the Holy Spirit over this church? our community? Our world? As you pray are the eyes of your heart open.... Because you can't wait...to see what God is going to do?

Lets commit to becoming praying people not just people who pray.... Begin praying when the day starts. Ask God to show you what to pray for.....As you drive to work...look for people you can pray for.....Every time you hear a siren...pray for those who need help....At the stop light...read bumper stickers and pray for those around you

When you watch the news or read the newspaper. Look for things and people to pray for....Pray for our president, pray for Israel, pray for our enemies, pray for those who are hurting...Pray for those in prisons, those caught in scandals...pray through the news.

Pray through your email and facebook....Pray through your client list...your appointments....Pray for every new person that you meet...If you have a free moment pray for your Fav 5 on your phone

When someone comes to your mind during the day....Maybe a person you thought of out of the blue...Perhaps your spouse or children...Your friend or someone in your small group/////Decide that the mention of someone's name will trigger a prayer in you.... Decide that every time you hear of another country that you pray for the missionaries there.

When you get bored in a meeting....or this sermon... Go around the room and silently in your mind pray for each person....Pray for the leaders and the mission that they are on....Pray that the meetings or the sermons will not be so boring in the future. ...Ask God why He put you there...just to bore you....Ask God if you may be the problem...

When you see a family out together...Pray that they will stay together....Pray for their marriage...pray for their children....Pray that they will know Jesus or if they do...that they will grow closer to Him.

Spend your day in constant dialogue with God...Constantly desperate for His presence...Constantly desperate for His Power...Asking Him to open your eyes to see all that He is doing...Ask the Holy Spirit to be your guide throughout each day.

Are you ready to open your eyes?

Let's Take this Lesson Home. Schedule a prayer walk. You can do this as a couple, as a small group, or by yourself. Parents and Grandparents take what we are learning and teach it ...Find time this week and take your kids, your grandkids, or whomever God has placed in your life on a prayer walk...Show them how they can learn to pray with their eyes opened.

Teach them to ask God to give them His eyes...And then listen as they show you their hearts...Here is another way to apply this lesson this week....

This one takes some guts...Pick someone you are close to...Try this with your spouse...Pray for them....With your eyes wide open...looking into theirs...There is a powerful connection that occurs when our eyes lock in prayer...And the eyes of our hearts experience ...The presence and power of Christ in that relationship...I want to challenge you to try this

Spend one day this week...Ask the Holy Spirit to Give you His Eyes...To show you everything that He wants you to see...Commit to praying for everything He reveals to you...Spend your day in constant prayer....We may as well start right now.....

For the next few minutes....As the altar is open... Process these questions with God as you think about the first Christ Followers...Are you desperate to be in the presence of Jesus? Are you desperate to receive more of Him? Do you want more of His power? Ask God to make this day your upper room experience....Ask Him to pour out His Holy Spirit on you...to baptize you...to immerse you in the Spirit.... Just like He did those first Christ followers....Come to the altar in anticipation of what God can do...when you pray...Come to the Altar with your eyes wide open. Let's pray.