

## **The Early Church Teaches Us To Pray For VBS!**

**Acts 1:12-14**

**Intro:** What if we could invite the early church to have a cup of coffee or a coke, and ask them the question, *What would you do to make VBS more effective?*

The key to understanding the New Testament church is to know their purpose: **Jesus** – **Acts 1:1** *“...of all that Jesus began both to do and teach”*

This year’s VBS is all about Jesus (it always is!) **Colossians 1:15-20**

Acts – continuing acts of Jesus Christ in the lives of believers and the fellowship, second volume of a story that has no end

The life of Jesus is continued... His body, the church, His is the Head of His church

The Bride of Christ... to love Jesus is to love His church

The Spirit was promised, the empowering presence of Christ in His church

**Acts 1:12-14** *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”*

**Key: The early church was a story of prayerful dependence!**

The Father was at work through ordinary people to do extraordinary things, and He wants to do the same today!

Their mission was God-sized, it turned the world upside down, and that mission has been passed on to us

Acts, a handful of men and women, changed their world, through prayer

***“Prayer is a vital organ, not a body part.”***

-Mark Vroegop, Pastor College Park Church, Indianapolis

*“Pastors and churches have to get uncomfortable enough to say, ‘We are not New Testament Christians if we don’t have a prayer life: This conviction makes us squirm a little, but how else will there be a breakthrough with God.’”* Ed Stetzer, Transformational Church

**Mark 11:17** *“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations...”*

What makes Jesus angry – using His assembly for other than its intended purpose  
Greatest need... not money, advertisements, etc. but praying men and women

*“The most powerful resource of the church is a transformed life. The world is not attracted to Christ by fancy edifices, but by men and women who have the mark of God upon their inner being. Prayer is the branding iron of God. We will not make an impact on our world until we have been marked by the Master. The mark of God upon our inner man will bring victory to churches, communities, and nations. We must learn that victory comes on our knees.”* Sammy Tippit

*“A church without the power of God is only a business, and prayer is a primary means by which we tap into His power!”*  
– Chuck Lawless *Eating the Elephant*

*'Poverty-stricken as the church is today in many things, she is the most stricken here, in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few prayers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere.'*

-Leonard Ravenhill, *Destined for the Throne*, 1959

-**Acts 1:14, 24; 2:42; 3:1; 4:23-31; etc.** – the Apostles leading others in prayer, not once is their personal prayer life recorded, not that they didn't pray privately, but they understood the importance of praying together

*"The greatest workings of God come by corporate prayer; and we will not see the power of God in sufficient measure to transform the world around us until we pray together. As a leader you must make praying together on the same priority level as preaching/teaching."* (John Franklin, *And the Place Was Shaken*, page 4)

-Of the 37 verses Jesus taught on prayer, 33 are corporate prayer

-**Matthew 7:7; Mark 11:25** the 'you' is plural

-**Matthew 18:19-20** power in unity, a spiritual synergy, like a magnifying glass

-Jesus' recorded times of private prayer occur prior to choosing the disciples (**Mark 1:37; Luke 3:21, 6:12**), after choosing them most of his recorded prayer times involved the disciples (**Luke 9:28, 11:1; Matthew 26:40**)

The following outline is based on chapter 2 in *Pray Like It Matters: Intimacy and Power Through Prayer* by Steve Gaines (Auxano Press, 2013)

**Luke 11:1** *"Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."*

Disciples asked Jesus to teach them only one thing... not preaching, Sunday School, seminary, choir, praise team, Lord's Supper, building, offerings...

Teach them to pray... not even 'how to pray...'

Historians tell us the average Jew prayed 3-4 hours a day... but they still ask, teach us to pray

Jesus didn't answer with schedules and timetables

Saw something in His eyes, His pace, His calm – ***craved the intimate communion with the Father He knew***

Want to find our way through an ineffective prayer life, to know I'm communicating with the Father in a way that is pleasing to Him

In the midst of everyday issues, pain, heartaches, questions about purpose and direction, filled with a desire to make our life count

We often treat prayer as our last resort, not our first and most powerful resource

## **The Early Church Encourages Preparation for VBS in Prayer**

**Acts 1:12-14** – Tradition says this was the same upper room of the last supper

The early church began in a ten-day prayer meeting      **Acts 1:14**

**Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8**      the connection to the source of their power

The apostles (minus Judas Iscariot), women, Jesus mother and brothers, small group  
Jesus' first command was to wait, before His second command – Go – waiting comes  
before going

Most of us don't like to wait for 10 minutes, let alone 10 days

We live in a day of fast food, microwave, speed lanes, etc.

Trust is tested when we wait, waiting demands faith

Somebody here today is in a waiting period, the story is going like you thought it would,  
more than ever, it is an invitation to wait on Him, develops ***dependence***

A time of waiting is an invitation to pray, and to pray together

Let the Father do a deeper work in your life through waiting in ***prayerful dependence***

**Acts 2:42** They spent time in prayer... mighty movement of the Father, day of  
Pentecost, divine power, they went into the streets, people from all over the Roman  
Empire...

120 Spirit-anointed disciples speaking, they heard in their own language

**Isaiah 56:7** *'For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.'*

Jesus quoted when He cleansed the Temple

No prayer, No power, Little prayer, Little power, Much prayer, Much power

Early church didn't begin with a program; it began in a white-hot prayer meeting

***Prayer attracts the manifest presence of God***

Where prayer focuses, God's power falls

Early church operated with such an anointing, power, higher level than we know  
today... does the Father still work the way He did then?

We seem all too comfortable trying to copy what other churches are doing

Trying to copy a copy... a copy of a copy is never as good as a copy of the original copy

They didn't have all the religious stuff we think we need... buildings, seminaries,  
bookstores, radio, TV, Internet, PowerPoint, projectors, etc.

Difference? We preach the same gospel, same message...

Different dispensation? A cop out...

We do not pray like they did.

Zeal for prayer, they learned to pray from Jesus, understood the significance of prayer, prayer warriors...

They did not just treat prayer like a zipper, to open and close meetings

One of the most distinguishing marks of the church in Acts

Changed a group of fearful disciples who were hiding, to a powerful, bold missionary force that changed the world

Did not always see prayer that way, had to be taught, to test the principles of prayer, much trial and error; they became stalwarts of power through prayer

### **The Early Church Teaches Us Jesus Shakes His House Through Prayer Acts 3:1-10; 4:19-20; 29-31**

They didn't ask for protection, but for power

**Acts 4:13** they had been with Jesus...

Began to speak the word of God with boldness

If we would pray like they prayed, we would know that boldness

Richard Foster wrote, *"To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ."*

God shook the place, when was the last time we experienced the presence of God?

*"By New Testament measurements, we are anemic and shallow. We certainly are distracted. Could it be that we are powerless at the very moment when our society needs to experience the reality of faith that rests on the power of God and not the wisdom of men (1 Corinthians 2:5)? – Daniel Henderson, Old Paths, New Power, p. 36*

### **The Early Church Demonstrates Prayer Should Precede Preaching And Witnessing Acts 6:4**

Problem in the church, selection of deacons, disciples mention prayer prior to preaching, not a coincidence, prayer always must come first

Not a reference to their personal prayer life, but the ministry of mobilizing the people of God to pray together

Two ministries, mobilizing the church to pray and preach/teach the word of God

Breathing with your diaphragm, must breath correctly to speak, sing correctly – we need to learn how to pray before we can effectively share the gospel

**Mark 3:13-15**

Had to spend time with Him before they could go

Passionate prayer precedes powerful witnessing

Learn to talk to God before we try to talk about/for God to others

Vertical communion with God precedes horizontal communication of the gospel

Sidlow Baxter wrote, *"Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons, but they are helpless against our prayers."*

**The Early Church Clarifies Jesus Speaks To Us When We Pray**

**Acts 10:1-8, 9-16, 34**

**Acts 10:15**

Tearing down the wall of racial/ethnic prejudice

Same time God was working in the heart of Cornelius, while he was praying

Both sides of the equation... through prayer, God was moving – gospel shared with the Gentiles

Still a lot of barriers, prejudice – government can't change that, only thing to change it is prayer... just like in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century

You will have students in VBS that need you to cross barriers, tear down some walls

**Proverbs 3:32** *'His secret counsel is with the upright.' 'He is a friend to the upright.' 'the upright are in His confidence' 'His is intimate with the upright.'*

I want to hear from Him, know His voice

His is still speaking, and if we are tuned in to listen through prayer, we hear

**The Early Church Establishes How Jesus Works Miracles When We Pray**

**Acts 12:5-11**

Where prayer focuses, God's power falls

James beheaded... 'drink the cup of suffering'

Peter *'but prayer was being made for him fervently...'*

Asleep between two soldiers, like Jesus asleep in the boat

**John 14:27** *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

An angel shows up... a miracle... God gets all the glory

We need this kind of fervent prayer

Essence of prayer is not to get the Father to join us, but for us to join Him

Not the boat pulling the shore to it, but pulling the boat to the shore (St. Augustine)  
Much more about changing us than changing things... or God  
*'Be it done to you according to your faith'*

Samuel Chadwick said, *"The one concern of the devil is to keep saints from prayer. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray."*

### **The Early Church Explains How Jesus Calls People To Missions When We Pray** **Acts 13:1-3**

**Acts 13:2** *'As **they ministered to the Lord** and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

Minister to the Lord through prayer and worship

They prayed and fasted again, then laid hands on them, the first mission trip

God did a mighty work, churches planted all over the Roman Empire

Church began in a prayer meeting, missions began in a prayer meeting

Not sitting around talking about what they should do, trying to figure it all out by themselves... believed God would show them what to do

More prayer, more sending

### **Matthew 9:36-38**

God's work always begins with prayer

**Challenge:** Some things God will only do when we pray, He works through praying people, Jesus turned the world upside down **Acts 17:6**

***"Rather than a religiously tame ritual, prayer is actually the most important and strategic work of kingdom advancement. It might be the least tame thing we ever do!"***  
***(Gary Mayes, DNA of a Revolution, p.189)***

*"In an awakening, the Spirit of God does not typically do a 'new' thing; He simply pours greater power upon the 'normal' things faithful Christians are already doing. Prayers become more intense; worship becomes more joyous; repentance becomes more sorrowful; and the preached Word yields greater effect. The Spirit of God multiplies the effectiveness of our normal work of seed planting, bringing a bountiful harvest. And He does more in a moment than we can accomplish in a lifetime." – J. D. Greear*

The apostles listed preaching the Word and prayer to God as their two most important ministries (Acts 6:1-4). They became people of authority and people of power as a result of their study of the Bible and the practice of prayer. The early believers were spiritual warriors. They knew that prayer was their main offensive weapon in winning the battle.

For us to be spiritual warriors we had better come to that same realization. Prayer is the indispensable and vital function of a believer. No aspect of our Christian life is more essential and crucial to our personal growth and health and the church's growth and health than spending time with God. We are never taller than when we are on our knees. We are never stronger than when we are confessing our weaknesses. We are never bolder in public than when we are quiet before God in private. Those individuals and churches that have been mightily used by God have been great prayers. Prayer warriors, like those mentioned in the book of Acts and those whose stories are told in annals of history, make prayer a way of life. They view prayer as the main business of their lives.

*"I have discovered an astonishing truth. God is attracted to weakness. He can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need him." – Jim Cymbala, Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*

Too often we trust our stuff and not our Savior

We are dependent on Him for the vitality of the church

He must be involved, invited into the story, our link to knowing His word and His mission for the church

*"Do not restrain prayer... For only through prayer can the prosperity of a church be increased or even maintained." – Charles Spurgeon*

College students waiting to hear Charles Spurgeon at Metropolitan Tabernacle, asked by an usher, would you like to see the heating plant... seven hundred people on their knees praying for the service on the floor above – the secret of the ministry of the tabernacle – that 'usher' was Charles Spurgeon

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### **Prayer Websites**

[blog.lifeway.com/growingdisciples/prayer-boot-camp/](http://blog.lifeway.com/growingdisciples/prayer-boot-camp/) Claude King's blog, includes free download of Prayer Boot Camp resources.

[harvestprayer.com](http://harvestprayer.com) Several prayer resources and links to other prayer groups. David Butts, president. (Not SBC)

[imb.org/pray](http://imb.org/pray) International Mission Board prayer page.

[inallthingspray.net](http://inallthingspray.net) Created by members of PrayerLink, a network of state convention and SBC entity prayer leaders partnering together to call and equip Southern Baptists to a renewed life of prayer to impact a lost world

[namb.net/prayer](http://namb.net/prayer) North American Mission Board prayer page.

[onecry.com](http://onecry.com) Nationwide call to spiritual awakening, several denominations and faith groups. (Not SBC)

[pray4everyhome.com](http://pray4everyhome.com) Great website to pray for every home in your neighborhood, by name. (Not SBC)

[praync.org](http://praync.org) Robust website from Chris Schofield Director, Office of Prayer, North Carolina Baptists, several free downloads

[scbo.org/pray](http://scbo.org/pray) State Convention of Baptists in Ohio webpage with prayer resources, several free downloads.

[strategicrenewal.com](http://strategicrenewal.com) and [64fellowship.com](http://64fellowship.com) Daniel Henderson – several resources for creating a prayer culture in the church, many free, including videos, etc. (Not SBC)