

**“THEY PRAYED.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**January 3, 2021, 9 and 10:30 AM**

**Scripture Texts: Acts passages on prayer**

### **Introduction.**

You will recall we have been working our way through the book of Acts off and on over the past couple of years. This morning I am going to preach through the entire book of Acts. Sounds daunting, sounds overwhelming, sounds crazy, sounds really long.

I am going to preach through the entire book of Acts this morning, but I am not going to play all the notes, I am going to play only one note, one note that is played over thirty times in the book of Acts, and that note is prayer.

As you have come to expect at the beginning of each year I challenge us to take up the habit of praying and reading Scripture, to renew our efforts, God helping us. And to the extent that all of us have fallen short or failed to do this, I urge us to fail forward, to make an intentional effort no matter how faulty.

In the book of Acts Dr. Luke describes in some detail the beginning history of the early Christian Church.

There is one thing that stands out about the early church and it is prayer. The early church was a praying church. The early church didn't talk about prayer, they didn't expect just the leaders to pray, they didn't hold conferences on prayer, they didn't just "say their prayers," they didn't just open and close their meetings with prayer, the early church prayed. The early church had a clear sense of desperate dependence on the triune God.

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

**Acts 1:24** And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen.

**Acts 2:42** They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

**Acts 3:1** Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

**Acts 4:31** And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

**Acts 6:4-6** We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the

Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

**Acts 7:59** As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

**Acts 8:14-15** Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 9:11** The Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying.

**Acts 9:40** But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.

**Acts 10:9** The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

**Acts 12:5** So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

**Acts 12:12** When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

**Acts 13:2-3** 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.” 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

**Acts 14:23** And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

**Acts 16:13** On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

**Acts 16:25-26** About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, 26 and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken.

**Acts 20:36** And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

**Acts 21:5-6** When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed 6 and said farewell to one another.

**Acts 27:29** And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come.

**Acts 28:8** It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him.

Notice it wasn't just at one set time of prayer, prayer happened at all hours, morning, noon, and midnight, and in all kinds of places for all manner of reasons.

Sometimes at the temple and synagogues during set times of prayer, sometimes in homes, sometimes in places of worship, sometimes in jail, at rivers or on beaches. Sometimes individuals praying, or two or three gathered in prayer, or larger gatherings. Spontaneous times of prayer before major decisions. In times of crisis. Prayer meetings out of which some great move of the Spirit takes place.

We hear bold prayers for wisdom, guidance, deliverance, healing, for a decision or direction.

They didn't trust their own wisdom or their own strength or their own ability to figure things out. They didn't turn to the latest ideas in books or on the internet. They didn't seek the wisdom of man; they sought the wisdom of God.

Every turning point, every major decision, every new move of God was bathed in prayer or grew out of a prayer meeting or some sort. When Jesus sets out to do anything on earth, He begins by setting someone to praying, or some group of someone's, or a church.

The early church was a praying church. And what happened? Over and over again they witnessed the power of God in answer to their prayers in tangible ways. They saw God act on their behalf in amazing ways. In the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, in conversions, in healings, in earthquakes, in providential acts of God on their behalf.

When is the one time we read in the Gospels when Jesus was really angry? The money-changers in the temple, right? What was it that made Him angry? Was it their greed, dishonesty? No, it was that they were perverting the place of prayer, they had turned it into something else, into something man-centered. The temple was to be the house of prayer for the nations.

***God has decided to connect His work here on earth with the prayers of His people.*** God has ordained the ends, the outcomes, and He has ordained the means to those ends. God intends for His people to be a praying people, to be a prayer centered people. This is the chief calling of Christians, to seek out their Lord and Savior in the constant fellowship of prayer, and see the glory of God in the power of God in answer to our prayers.

More things happen in this world because of prayer than you can ever dream of or imagine. Answered prayer is God's fingerprints, and His fingerprints are all over everything.

Let's be clear about something in Acts. They were not a perfect church, not even close. What we see is churches with flaws, full of people who are sinners, praying to Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit and as they humbled themselves in dependent prayer, the power of God was manifest through them, and it changed the world around them. God delights to answer the prayers of sinners who humble themselves before Him.

When action was required their first action was to pray. Prayer was central to everything they did, and that is still true today.

We started 2020 with a call to pray for five things. One of those prayers has been clearly answered, an associate pastor. Another prayer was answered in a way we never expected, Serve 2020. The other three are on-going needs to be prayed for.

*I call us to be a praying church, I urge us to make this our number one priority in 2021.*

Pray like our life depends on it because it does. I urge us to not neglect this great gift of God's grace. I urge us to move beyond vague, general, casual half-hearted requests, to make big, bold requests. Get focused, direct, in earnest. Make your reasons clear, bring your best arguments.

Do you feel like you are spiritually dry? Do you feel like your prayer life is stagnant? Do you feel like as you look over the past year that you have not made much progress in your personal spiritual growth?

Do you want 2021 to be blessed, do you want your life and home to be filled with God's blessings? They come in through the door of prayer.

Pray like you believe powerful things can happen from a powerful God. Fight against distractions and laziness and make a consistent time for prayer, personally and as a family. Make a time and a place that works for you with the least distractions. Join with a few others.

Don't give up. When you fail, get up and go again. Fail forward. If you aren't sure what to pray, ask God for help, start with Scripture. I found myself praying along as I was reading through Hosea yesterday.

Finally, prayer is not just asking God for what we want, it is asking for God, wanting God, wanting His presence, His peace, His wisdom, His power. It is submitting and surrendering to Him and His will. Thy will be done.

I urge us to make the year of our Lord 2021 a year of prayer to our Lord that we might see the power of God manifest in our midst for His glory.

**Prayer:** Jesus, teach us what to pray and how to pray. We are so inadequate, and we fall so far short. We ask too little and too infrequently. Father help those who are still confused about prayer to seek you and to search your Scriptures. Holy Spirit, guide those who struggle and prod those who need a wakeup call. Father, thank you that you are the one true prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God and that you only give good gifts. Help us to see your answers when they aren't what we asked for or wanted. And all of this we ask, believing in the strong name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.