

Study 2: Prayer Brings God to Us (Acts 4:24)

One of the most dominant features of the New Testament church was that they prayed. Following the ascension of Jesus, the followers of Jesus were left in Jerusalem, and even though they were without Jesus' physical presence, spiritually they were still in contact with Him because they prayed.

When the disciples were selecting the replacement for Judas they prayed because the decision was too great to make by themselves. Following Peter's sermon on Pentecost that resulted in many new believers, they were instructed in spiritual growth tools and among those tools was prayer.

Prayer was such a way of life that they took time out each day, even in the afternoons, to spend time in prayer to God. Prayer was so important to the apostles that they set aside other servants to care for the physical needs of the widows, so they could spend extended periods of time in prayer themselves.

Do you see the picture?

Prayer is not to be:

1. *Some function tacked on at the end of a service as a formality.*
2. *An agenda item that if we get to it then we will pray as if it does not matter or it has no value.*

Prayer is to be:

1. *Prominent in the life of the believer.*
2. *Primary in our relationship with Jesus.*
3. *Prestigious in the life of a church and its members.*

Our prayers should move beyond the walls of the church and embrace the concerns and needs of our communities with the power of God.

Upon Peter and John's release from the chief priests and elders, they and the other disciples made it a point to take time to pray.

Acts 4:23-24

[23] When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. [24] And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God.

1. *This was not an off-the-cuff prayer.*
2. *The whole community joined together in prayer.*
3. *They knew they needed God more than they needed each other.*
4. *They were not first trying to get through to God - they were opening up to God who was trying to get through to them!*

Prayer reminds us that we need God more than he needs us.

1. *Prayer brings God to us.*
2. *The essence of prayer is for us to join God, not for God to join us.*
3. *We should ask what is on God's heart rather than telling God what is on our hearts.*
4. *Do you do that?*
5. *Do you ask GOD –*
What is on His heart?
What is on His mind?

What is prayer?

1. *Prayer is the lifeline that saves the drowning soul.*
2. *Prayer is the umbilical cord that provides nourishment to the starving spirit.*
3. *Prayer is the channel by which God's life-giving presence flows to us.*

St. Augustine, the early church father and theologian, described prayer as like a man in a hapless boat who throws a rope at a rock. The rock provides the needed security and stability and life for the helpless man. When the rock is lassoed, it's not the man pulling the rock to the boat (though it may appear that way); it is the pulling of the boat to the rock.

1. *Jesus is the rock, and we throw the rope through prayer.*

Through prayer God comes to us.

James 4:8a

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Prayer provides the communication that puts us in contact with God

One of the major problems of our prayer life today is that we focus too much on:

1. *Ourselves.*
2. *Our needs.*
3. *Our concerns.*
4. *Our wishes.*
5. *Our wants, than on God.*

Reflect on your prayers of the past, how much time did you spend on your concerns versus God? God **MUST** become central in our prayers and the church's prayer meetings.

Illustration of Grace:

There is a story that captured the hearts of New Yorkers less than two weeks before the Thanksgiving holiday season. The temperature was in the 30's and a cold rain was falling. The roads were slick.

Victoria Rufalo drove her Hyundai west to her home on Long Island. She was returning from her 14 year old niece's recital and was almost home when it happened. She doesn't remember if she noticed the oncoming silver Nissan.

Earlier that evening the occupants of the Nissan had broken into a car parked at a local movie-plex and stole a credit card. The six young people charged almost \$400 of DVD's and games at a local video outlet. They were caught on tape at a local grocery store as they bought, among other things, a 20 pound turkey.

At 12:30AM, the paths of these six young people and Victoria crossed in a bizarre and life changing manner.

Victoria has no memory of the teenage boy leaning out the rear driver's side window as their cars drew near - or of the 20 pound turkey that crashed through her windshield bending the steering wheel inward. The impact of the turkey crashing through her windshield broke every bone in her face and knocked her unconscious, causing severe and significant brain damage.

More than three weeks later she was told what happened on that night, but she could NOT possibly process it. Now, her restructured caved in face and broken palate had four titanium plates screwed to hold in place the reassembled pieces of her facial bones. A synthetic film had been inserted to hold her eye in place. Surgery had left her with a tracheotomy and a wired jaw.

She heard the experience, but she could not process it!

The news media kept the story alive through the holidays with updates on Victoria's progress and the guilty pleas of five teenagers. All of them except Ryan Cushing, the 18 year old who threw the Turkey pleaded guilty. In January, Ryan entered a plea of Not Guilty – the charges against him could result in 25 years in prison.

On Monday, August 15th, Ryan and Victoria met face to restructured face for the first time in the courtroom. Nine months after that eventful night, his victim was still undergoing Physical Rehabilitation, but she walked into the courtroom under her own power. On that day, Ryan pleaded guilty to a lesser charge and received a sentence of six months in jail and five years of probation that included psychological therapy and Public service.

The plea bargain came at the request of his victim.

After he pled guilty, Ryan was guided by his lawyer to approach Rufalo. She threw her arms around the side of the boy, stroked his hair and whispered:

“I forgive you.”

“I love you.”

“I want the best for your life.”

The scene in the courtroom left people in tears - even Ryan's experienced lawyer and the news reporters who were waiting to make their reports to a live radio audience.

The New York Times called it in the headlines story the next day, “A Moment of Grace.”

That's what Jesus did for us! He took our sins upon his body.

He said:

I forgive you!

I love you!

I want the best for your life!