

## **MULTIPLY – Gospel Movements**

Prayer

Acts 1:12-14

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*<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. <sup>14</sup> All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. Acts 1:12–14 (ESV)*

*<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. Acts 2:42–44 (ESV)*

Through an eight-week study of Acts 1-11, we are attempting to understand how gospel influence can be multiplied. We are attempting to answer three critical questions:

- 1) What were the ingredients for the missional movement of the early church?
- 2) What unique mission is God calling College Park to in 2018?
- 3) What is your Spirit-empowered mission?

We want to see if we can identify the key ingredients that marked the spread of the gospel in the early days of Christianity. How did the gospel message spread so quickly from eleven disciples and about 120 followers to an empire-wide church-planting movement?

We also want to ask ourselves about the specific role of our church in the spread of the gospel to our Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. Our Elders meet at the end of this month for our annual retreat, and we are praying about how to increase of our effectiveness in getting people spiritually connected, in reaching unsaved people, in deploying more people to the mission field, in equipping leaders inside and outside the church, and in planting and re-planting more churches. Tomorrow night at our Elder meeting, we will be considering the adoption of The Rock Bible Church in Greenwood, and we are interviewing a candidate for a multi-ethnic church plant in Pike Township.

So, we have some big and strategic opportunities on the horizon.

However, the third aim is for each of you to see yourself as being deployed with your own Spirit-empowered mission. Last week I shared the metaphor of the church as an aircraft carrier—certainly not a cruise ship, and not really like a battleship. The power of multiplication is not in our church programs, staff, or Sunday services, but in you living out the gospel in your contacts with people.

The scale of ministry is enormous if it is multiplied through each of us. For instance, just think of how many people you engaged with this week. Would 25 be a safe, average number? If the 200 people who attend Castleton were each to connect with 25 people, that would be pushing 6,000 people in our community. At North Indy the number would be over 95,000.

The point from last week was for you to realize that Jesus is still doing His work. There is more that Jesus intended to do through His disciples. We are part of the story beyond Acts 28. The church was not Plan B. The way that Jesus accomplishes His mission is through us, as we multiply gospel influence right where we are.

### **Prayer: The Fuel of Gospel Movements**

Today we are going to look at the next three verses in the first chapter of Acts. We will see the priority the early church gave to prayer. It was the fuel behind the spread of the gospel. As we'll see today, this commitment to prayer is a frequent theme in the book Acts. Chapter one is the first example of the priority of prayer in the life of the church.

Beyond the book of Acts, if you were to look at church history, you'd find the same thing. Behind sweeping movements of gospel multiplication was intentional, committed, faithful prayer. Gospel movements always involved prayer movements. The church's health and influence are seen by its heart and practice of prayer. Here is what Spurgeon said:

The condition of the church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. So is the prayer meeting a grace-ometer, and from it we may judge of the amount of divine working among a people. If God be near a church, it must pray. And if He be not there, one of the first tokens of His absence will be a slothfulness in prayer!<sup>1</sup>

Just let that last line sink in: "one of the first tokens of his absence will be a slothfulness in prayer." That statement, and the commitment we'll see in the book of Acts, alarms me. Here's why. When I started at College Park in 2008, our monthly prayer gatherings were full. But over the years, and as our attendance and ministries have increased, our monthly prayer meeting attendance has dropped. In fact, in December, we had the lowest attended prayer meeting ever—about 250 people. Yet if you asked anyone who was there, we sensed the presence of God in a real way.

Maybe the Lord was just testing us. Or maybe we have a bigger problem that we need to talk about. The common pattern among churches is that the more established or large they become, the greater the tendency to neglect prayer. Churches, like individuals, become self-sufficient. And frankly I see this trend happening in our church. It concerns me a great deal, and I feel personally responsible to call us to consider what it says when over 75 percent of our people are choosing to do something else besides pray.

I know there are some legitimate reasons, but I also know that many of us, if we're honest, would rather do just about anything than pray. And yet prayer is a vital aspect of what fueled gospel movements in the Bible and in history.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2008), 56.

From Acts 1, here is what we find: a **commitment to wait together regularly in prayer.**

### 1. Commitment to Wait

I want you to notice that the first action step for the disciples after the ascension of Jesus was go back to Jerusalem and wait. After the angels appeared to them in Acts 1:11, they left the Mount of Olives and traveled about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile back to capital city.

This is exactly what Jesus told them to do. Acts 1:4-5 records His instructions:

*<sup>4</sup> 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;"<sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Acts 1:4–5 (ESV)*

Take note that the first ministry activity of the disciples was not to develop a plan, to hold a large meeting, to create a program, to publish a book (even an inspired one), to raise money, to train leaders, or to start knocking on doors. The very first activity was to wait. They were to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

According to verse 13, they not only went back to Jerusalem, but they also gathered in "the upper room." Some commentators believe that this is the same room used in the Last Supper in Mark 14:15 or the gathering place for prayer during Peter's arrest in Acts 12:12. John Mark's mother had such a room at her home. We are not entirely sure about its location, but we do know that it was big enough to hold 120 people (Acts 1:15).

Gathered in this room are the people who would be responsible for the spread of the gospel. Verse 13 lists the names of the eleven disciples, and verse 14 lets us know that others were there too, including women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. The people in this room were vital to gospel multiplication. For example:<sup>2</sup>

- Peter became a leader of the church, preached in modern-day Turkey, and likely helped start the church in Rome
- John was banished to the Isle of Patmos and wrote the Gospel of John, 1-3 John, and Revelation
- James, along with James of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, were key leaders in the church in Jerusalem
- Andrew is believed to have preached the gospel in Scythia
- Phillip was the first to preach the gospel in Samaria, as recorded in Acts 8
- Thomas is believed to have ministered in modern-day Iran and Afghanistan
- Bartholomew likely traveled to India
- Matthew not only wrote a gospel account of Jesus' life, but he also preached in the city of Parthia
- Thaddeus (also called Judas the son of James) was likely a missionary to Turkey, Syria, and Iraq
- Two brothers of Jesus (not named), Jude and James, both wrote New Testament letters, and James pastored the influential church in Jerusalem.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.quora.com/Where-did-each-of-the-apostles-travel-after-Christ's-ascension>

I share all of this for you to realize that these people were involved in amazing and transforming works of ministry, but their first step was to wait and pray. Why is this important?

First, it fits with the commissioning of Jesus' ministry which the disciples are continuing. Luke connects the launch of Jesus' earthly ministry with His baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit—"When Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him . . ." (Luke 3:21). The disciples are waiting for their commissioning as well.

Second, praying and waiting were vital parts of Jesus' ministry. He often spent time alone in communion with the Father. In Luke 6:12 Jesus continued all night in prayer before calling His disciples. Prayerful communion with the Father was central to Jesus' ministry.

Third, it is apparent that the disciples and the church at large would need to be filled with the power of God through the Holy Spirit. Their success in ministry would not come by virtue of their own strength, but they would be filled with the power of God. This is why Paul highlights prayer and the Spirit at the end of his list of the armor of God:

<sup>18</sup> *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints... Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)*

Their waiting on God was providential and strategic. It was commanded by Jesus. It was vital to what would happen. When it comes to multiplying, don't make the mistake of thinking waiting is a waste. Let me give you a few applications:

**Embrace waiting.** If God has you in a season of waiting on Him, embrace it as the prelude and preparation for what He has next. Bank your life on the truth in Isaiah 64:4 that "God works for those who wait for him."

**Work by waiting.** Don't make the mistake of thinking that prayer is only the preparation for the work. Waiting on God is the work of ministry.

**Prioritize waiting.** Be sure to build moments of prayerful waiting on God in your life, your family, and your ministry. Without this important rhythm, it is easy to slip into a pattern of self-sufficient ministry. Prioritizing prayer challenges our self-reliance.

Paul Miller, in his excellent book, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*, says this:

Time in prayer makes you even more dependent on God because you don't have as much time to get things done. Every minute spent in prayer is one less minute where you can be doing something "productive." So the act of praying means that you have to rely more on God.<sup>3</sup>

Waiting on God is never a waste. It is vital to multiplication because of what it does to us.

## 2. Together in Prayer

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009), 49.

The second ingredient that we find here is the priority of corporate prayer. As the early church waited, they prayed. And they did it together. More than just individual prayer, the disciples valued gathering together for the purpose of prayer. We find this clearly stated in verse 14.

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

The New Living Translation says it this way:

<sup>14</sup> *They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus. Acts 1:14 (NLT)*

The idea, according to R. Kent Hughes, is that they met with unity, persistence, and dependence.<sup>4</sup> They were **unified** in the sense that all the remaining disciples, and others, were there. Even though they came from all walks of life, and even though the leader that brought them together was gone, they keep meeting. Men, women, young, old, professional, and common worker were all there in prayer.

The text says “one accord.” The Greek word here means being of one mind. The idea is that they shared the same purpose or the same mission. It is the same word we saw in Romans 15:6 when we talked about worship – “that together with one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6). They were unified together.

Mark it down: When the church is prayer-less, it is because we have drifted from our collective mission. Or to state it positively, a church that understands her mission in the world will be a church that prays together. When a church understands that the struggle is against rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers (Eph. 6:11), it will pray together.

They were also **persistent**. The text says that they devoted themselves to prayer. The word means constantly. Another word that is critical to prayer is to persevere. The Bible often calls us to keep praying. A few examples:

- <sup>2</sup> *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. (Colossians 4:2)*
- <sup>1</sup> *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18:1)*
- <sup>38</sup> *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Mark 14:38)*
- <sup>18</sup> *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints . . . (Ephesians 6:18)*

They were deeply committed to prayer. Are you deeply committed to prayer—and not just by yourself but with others? Do you know that there may be some things in your life that God is not doing—things He wants to do!—but things He will not do because you need to learn to pray.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996), 26-27.

And that brings us to the last mark of their praying together – **dependence**. These people knew they needed God’s help. They were waiting for God to move. That’s why they prayed. Dependent people pray. Independent people don’t. It’s as simple as that.

We see this dependence as a mark of the church throughout the book of Acts. It starts here, but we’ll see it over and over. For example:

- Prayer was a part of their regular rhythm of worship gatherings (Acts 2:42)
- Peter and John perform their first miracle on the way to prayer (Acts 3:1)
- When persecution begins, the church gathers for prayer (Acts 4:24)
- Prayer was how they ordained leaders (Acts 6:6)
- When Peter is in prison and likely to be killed, the church gathers to pray (Acts 12:12)
- And when Saul is converted to Paul, the angel affirms his conversion by saying, “behold he is praying” (Acts 9:11)

Trace the story of the church and the spread of the gospel, and you will find a saturation with prayerful dependence. If you trace the roots of the sweeping movements of revival in church history, you will find a band of people who were committed to prayer. On December 31, 1738, George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, four other preachers, and sixty other Christians prayed into the New Year. Some view this prayer meeting as the start of the Evangelical Revival in England. The effect of these prayer meetings was substantial on Whitefield.

*“These . . . made Whitefield feel through all his soul, that he ought to do everything to win souls, and that he could do anything he might attempt. . . prayer meetings were to Whitefield what the third heavens were to Paul: the finishing school of his ministerial education. He was as much indebted to them for his unction. . . as to Pembroke College for his learning.”<sup>5</sup>*

Where is our confidence and hope? What are we depending upon? If we are going to truly multiply to reach our kids, our neighbors, our city, our nation, or the world, we must pray. What if we were twenty minutes of prayer away from God moving in ways that would blow our minds?

Or maybe you are here today because someone has been praying for you. It could be that this very message is designed by God because of faithful mother, father, friend, or grandparent who has been praying for you. Why not give your life to Jesus today?

If God is going to use us in accordance with His sovereign plan, then we have to be willing to meet together and pray. Without prayer, we will not multiply. Prayer must be part of the fabric of the church, or multiplication will not be a part of our story.

### **3. Pray Together Regularly**

The final ingredient comes from a summary statement found in Acts 2:42-43. After Pentecost, which we’ll look at next week, the church settles into a regular believing community after three thousand people

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<sup>5</sup> Iain Murray, *Pentecost Today? The Biblical Basis for Understanding Revival*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1998), 67-68.

were converted. It was an incredible spiritual harvest. And yet it was not the ordinary activity of the church.

Verse 42-43 describes the community life of the church. There were four ingredients to that community life and prayer was a vital part of it.

*<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. Acts 2:42-43 (ESV)*

The church was marked by teaching. They learned about the life of Jesus and what it meant to follow Him. The church enjoyed fellowship. We'll talk more about this in two weeks, but for now it simply means that they did life together. They broke bread together, referring to the celebration of the Lord's table, which we do regularly.

And they prayed together. As regular as the church received teaching, fellowshiped, and celebrated the Lord's table, they balanced out their ministry with regular times of prayer. Meeting together for prayer was part of the rhythm of their church life. It was a vital ingredient for this success.

Look at the effect! In verse 42 we see that the people were filled with the awe of God and the power for ministry. Their regular commitment to the key ingredients of the church resulted in an unusual empowerment for the advancement of the gospel.

### **Prayer is Our Fuel Too!**

Regular, dependent prayer creates powerful ministry. That is how the gospel multiplied. In the same way that early church was fueled by prayer, so we must also be. Do you long to see hard-hearted people converted? Then we need to pray. Do you desire to see unreached peoples be miraculously drawn to Jesus? Then we should pray. Do you need boldness in your home, your place of employment, your neighborhood, or your school? Then you should pray. Do you have a distracted, over-busy heart? You should pray.

College Park, listen to me very carefully. God has entrusted us with many blessings, but we must be careful not to neglect the work of prayer in our lives and in our church. Prayer is still essential to the mission of multiplication.

For the sake our neighbors, our city, and the world, we must be committed to praying together. Multiplication happens in powerful ways as God's people get serious about prayer.

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