

## 16. Developing Our Prayer Life in Small Group Bible Studies

In our past few topics, we have been talking about Bible study and fellowship groups (apostles' doctrine and fellowship groups). We said that the purpose of small group Bible studies can be summarized by the statement: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising from Acts 2:42-47. Today, we will be looking at the seventh purpose of Bible study and fellowship groups which is: Prayer.

In Acts 2:42, we read, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." In this verse, we see that one of the primary things that the early Christians did as they gathered together was spend time praying together. Then, in Acts 3:1, we read, "Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*." This verse shows us that at least part of the early believers got together daily for prayer. Acts 4:31 tells us about the results of a group prayer meeting that was held during the time the early Christians were persecuted. "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."

We see that the early church also gathered together for prayer when Herod was getting ready to kill Peter. Acts 12:5 says, "Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church." The Lord answered their prayers, and when Peter was released, he knew where to go to find a group of Christians praying together. Acts 12:13 says, "So, when he had considered *this*, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying." From these verses, we see that the early church did not handle problems the way many people handle them today. When there was a problem, the early church held prayer meetings to ask God to solve the problem.

However, the early church did not just gather for prayer when there were problems. Instead, prayer was a key part of their life together in Christ. In fact, a look at prayer in the book of Acts will show us that the early church frequently spent time together in prayer. In fact, that church began in a prayer meeting. Acts 1:14 says, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." Acts 2:1-4 tells us what happened after ten days of prayer, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Later, as the church grew, the apostles said that although there were many good things that the church needed to do, there were two priorities that were most important for them as the leaders of the church. Acts 6:3-4 says, "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The apostles delegated all except two of their responsibilities to other Christians. However, as leaders, they realized that there were two priorities for them and those were to be their focus. The apostles said they would:

- Give themselves continually to prayer
- Give themselves continually to the ministry of the Word

That same day, the apostles also prayed as they committed seven men to the ministry of caring for the needs of the widows, in Acts 6:6. Acts 6:7 tells us the results of making prayer the first priority, “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.” Here, we see that one of the results of having proper priorities, as leaders, was that the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. As leaders, we set the example by our prayer life.

Many Christians limit their prayers to physical needs. It is important to pray for physical needs. Peter demonstrated this when he prayed for Tabitha in Acts 9:40, “But Peter put them all out, 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.” However, we see that there are many other things that we should pray for as we gather together for prayer. We will mention just a few from the book of Ephesians:

- ◆ We should pray that God would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ – Eph. 1:17
- ◆ We should pray that God would enlighten the eyes of our understanding – Ephesians 1:18
- ◆ We should pray that we will know the hope of God’s calling – Ephesians 1:18
- ◆ We should pray that we will know the riches of the glory of His inheritance – Ephesians 1:18
- ◆ We should pray that we would know the exceeding greatness of His power – Ephesians 1:19
- ◆ We should pray that God will strengthen us with might in the inner man – Ephesians 3:16
- ◆ We should pray that Christ will dwell in our hearts by faith – Ephesians 3:17
- ◆ We should pray that we will be rooted and grounded in love – Ephesians 3:17
- ◆ We should pray that we will know the love of Christ that passes knowledge – Ephesians 3:18
- ◆ We should pray that we will be filled with all the fulness of God – Ephesians 3:19
- ◆ We should always pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit – Ephesians 6:18
- ◆ We should pray for boldness to speak the Word of God – Ephesians 6:18-19

One of the ways, to help a group learn how to expand their prayer life, is to encourage them to list the things that are mentioned in the various prayers in the New Testament. We have just illustrated that by listing the prayers of Paul and his requests for prayer which are mentioned in the book of Ephesians. Some other prayers or requests for prayer that you could discuss with the Bible study group include:

Romans 1:9-10, 10:1, 15:30-33  
 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, 5:20, 13:7  
 Philippians 1:9, 4:6  
 Colossians 1:9-12, 4:2-4, 12  
 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 5:17, 23, 25  
 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, 3:1  
 1 Timothy 2:1-4  
 James 5:13-16

In addition to these verses, the Gospels, and the book of Acts, also list many other spiritual needs that we should include as we pray for one another. As people learn to pray for spiritual needs, as well as physical needs, they will see a growing maturity both in their own spiritual life and in the lives of those for whom they are praying. That is one reason why it is so important to help Bible study groups learn to pray for others.

In Ephesians 4:15-16, we read, “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” In these verses, we see that Christ wants every Christian to:

- ◆ Learn to speak the truth in love
- ◆ Grow up in all things into Christ, our Head
- ◆ Learn to function as a part of a healthy body
- ◆ Be joined and knit together by what every joint supplies
- ◆ Work effectively as every Christian learns to do His share

Christ says when these things are happening the body will be building itself up in love. These things will only happen as we really learn to pray for one another and with one another.

The Lord wants every Christian to learn to pray. People learn to pray best as they observe and listen to others pray. That is illustrated for us so well in Luke 11:1, where we read: “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.’” The disciples heard Christ pray and that caused them to want to learn to pray. As you pray in Bible study and fellowship groups, others are learning how to pray and really communicate with God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help people grow in their prayer life.