

1. WITNESSING

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Prayer

Welcome to the first session of our witnessing program. You know, it's a wonderful thing to be able to come together as God's people and discuss methods whereby we can better lead men and women to Jesus. And in this first program I want to discuss with you what I regard as one of the most important preparations if we're going to be, successful in our witness, and that is, the necessity of prayer.

When I think about the early Christian church, and what they did in the first century, it always inspires me. When you think of the small group of people who lacked formal education; had very, very little social influence; and had little economic power at all. And you consider that within three centuries, the whole of the then-known world was influenced by Christianity, even though the Roman world was disintegrated. And you find that this Christianity which began as a mere sect, finally had universal appeal to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. You've got to say that there must have been some special formula that was followed by those early Christians. And it's that formula that I want to discuss with you in our first program together.

I invite you to turn to the book of Colossians and I'll read you what Paul said that happened toward the latter part of the first century.

Colossians 1:23. "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled; and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven...."

Now you think about that. Here Paul in his letter to the Colossians could say that the message of God had been preached to every creature under heaven. What a gigantic task! And it was Josephus who suggested that by the end of the first century, Christianity had about five million converts.

Now Jesus met finally with the disciples on the Mount of Olives. Remember He had gone up there, and He had taken that small band of disciples. There they were gathered. I stood on the very spot not so long ago where Jesus gathered that band of disciples. And just before He ascended up into heaven, He put His hands out in blessing upon them and He said, "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people."

Have you ever noticed that when Jesus ascended and was caught up in the clouds, did those disciples immediately go out and preach about the unsearchable riches of Christ? Did they go out into the streets and preach to people? Not at all.

In fact, I want you to notice what they did.

Acts 1:14. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication...."

What did they do? They met together in prayer for communion, and they prayed, and they prayed. They isolated themselves together in order to commune with God for that power. And this was really the glorious preamble to Pentecost, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I want you to notice that as soon as the early church found themselves with a problem, what did they do?

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Verse 24. “And they prayed, and said, Thou Lord, which knows the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen.”

You see, there were eleven at this stage, and they needed to get one more to make up the twelve to replace Judas Iscariot. And in order to do that, they had a problem. So they just didn't meet together and decide among themselves. Rather they met in prayer first of all that God would direct them and lead them. Then you'll find that Luke describes the spirit which possessed those people.

Acts 2:42. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship....”

You see, doctrine was important to those early Christians. They not only continued in the doctrine. But they also continued in warm fellowship. And how important that is that in our church we have warm fellowship! You know, one of the most upsetting things about many of our churches is this lack of fellowship that we have among one another. And I notice that it's a characteristic of the early Christian church that they not only prayed, they not only continued in correct doctrine, but they had fellowship one with the other, and it goes on to say,

Verse 42. “...and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.”

Notice how the writer of Acts, Dr. Luke continually emphasizes the matter of prayer. Prayer was vital.

Acts 3:1. “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.”

They went up there in the hour of prayer, and what happened as a result of them going up to the temple? If you read further on down in the third chapter of Acts, you'll find that the lame man was healed. As soon as the church comes together in prayer, something happens every time.

Then after Peter and John, you know the story, they were released from prison, and they went to the believers. They knew where they were gathered. They told them what God had done. I want you to notice what happened.

Acts 4:24-29. “And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

25. “Who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

26. “The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ.

27. “For of a truth against Thy holy Child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together.

28. “For to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done.

29. “And now, Lord, behold their threatening: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word.”

You know, I like that. When we spend time in prayer, God gives us a holy boldness. We lose our shyness and our timidity, and we get that holy boldness. And the early church here prayed, “Grant us unto Thy servants, that with all boldness, they may speak Thy word.” Do you ever feel you need boldness when you start to witness to people? I'm sure we all feel a need of boldness. Well, this is where the boldness comes from. Most of us are shy by nature. Most of us are retiring by nature, but that can be changed through prayer as it was in the early church. We continue to read the next verse, and they are still praying.

Verse 30. “By stretching forth Your hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of the holy Child Jesus.”

Now that's how they prayed. They took the promises of God, and the results were astonishing. You notice the next verse.

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Verse 31. “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”

There it is. You see, when they prayed, the Holy Spirit came upon them and gave them that holy boldness. Would to God that every one of us has that. And it can be ours as we follow the program that the early Christian church followed.

Then following the dramatic events of the Damascus Road in the story of Paul the Apostle, when Christ came to Paul and he was stopped in his tracks on the Damascus Road as he was going down there to wipe out Christianity, the voice of Jesus said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou Me?” Saul no doubt looked up into the face of Jesus and saw Jesus as He was, dying on the cross. Paul later says in his letters to the Corinthians that it was the face of Jesus that completely transformed him.

You know, we have been told haven't we that it would be a good thing if we spend a thoughtful hour every day in contemplating the life of Christ, especially the closing scenes. And that's what it was that transformed the Apostle Paul. And God told Ananias to contact Paul.

Every time I start an evangelistic series, some months before the program starts, I like to call the church together. Now may be it might be on a Wednesday night during prayer meeting time. You might find that it's better on Sabbath afternoons. I think that Sabbath afternoons is better because sometimes on Wednesday nights it's not always possible to get every one out, especially those with families. We would like every person, both husband and wife, every member of the church to come out to this program. And in this program, I discuss the whole plan of the evangelistic program. I put it to the church. And I tell them the ideas that I have in mind.

And therefore we can have a discussion. Sometimes we get some very, very fine suggestions made with the members of our church. Then we decide that we are going to meet every week at a time arranged that would be suitable to every church member or at least a majority of the church members. And I take a little devotion on it in which I stress the need of prayer. And I stress the fact that if our work is going to be blessed, and it's going to have eternal dividends, and that we're going to see the church build up, not only numerically, but built up spiritually in fellowship, then we will need to spend time together as a church in prayer.

So what I do in the first meeting is that I go over to the blackboard and I invite the church members to place on this board the names of every contact, every person that they would like to see won to the truth of God placed on this board. We need a big board, especially if you've got a larger church, you need a very large board. And we start with names. We will find that names will be given of backsliders in the area, those who have fellowshiped with the church at one stage but now have left that fellowship. And so all these names go up. We have sons and daughters of church members. We have relatives, friends, and before long we find that the whole board is full of names.

And if possible I like to ask the church member who is giving the names to give us a little of the history of that person. That doesn't mean to say that we have to get out all of the skeletons and the dirty washing about all the mistakes that a person has made. Not like that at all. But at least a little bit of the history of the person. So that when we pray for that man or that woman or that young person, that we would be a little bit understanding of the situation that led to their no longer fellowshiping with the church. Or on the other hand, if it's just a friend of someone who we would like to interest, to give us a little back ground as to who they are so that we can pray intelligently about that person.

So we spend quite some time in putting on the board, names. Fill it right up. May be put it up two or three times. And then I suggest that the church members each get a card about six inches by four inches. And on that card, they are to list all the names that we have just placed on the board. And the reason that I'm suggesting this size it's because most Bibles, if you have a decent sized Bible, if you're going to be successful in the work of soul winning, get a decent Bible, and one that's got a margin in it so that you can jot points in it, and when you're talking to people, you can bring to mind some of the important points. And

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if you've got a Bible that is a decent size then the card will stay right inside the front cover and you can keep it there so that it doesn't get lost. Maybe you can even tape it there.

And the reason that I'm suggesting that is because when you do your Bible study at home, when you have your devotionals, and when you pray, that card is not far from you. And as we kneel down to pray we might take five or six of those names. And in our prayer we would pray for every one of those persons by name. That's why we've listed them down on the card. You won't be able to remember them all. Some you won't even be able to remember the reasons why they were placed on the board, but remember that God knows all about them. And you're praying here for Mrs. Williams. "God bless her. God, incline her heart that as the invitation is given that she goes out to the meetings. As I call on her, as I visit her, that her heart will respond." Pray that the angels of God will go before you in your contact with that person. And then next time I pray, I might pray for the next few people on the list. And so regularly, perhaps every week I would go through all the names.

Now there maybe on that card some particular people who I have a real burden for. These are some of my interests, you see. These are my neighbors and my friends, and I have been working with them. And so of course these folk I may tend to mention in my prayers every time I pray because I'm particularly burdened for them. Remember that these other names will probably have other folk who are particularly burdened for them. But I like to suggest that every one of us in the church pray for every name on that list, at least over a weekly cycle so that we are continually praying for the folk that have been suggested.

And week by week as we come together in our meetings and in our training class, one of the things that will be thrilling will be to have reports from the particular members who have put their names on the board as to what progress has been made. Now sometimes this is a thing which is lacking in our meetings together. We put up names, but we never hear of any results. And once we see some results taking place, we've got something to praise God for. So I believe that it's an important thing that we continually keep that list before our church member's attention.

Now I would be careful and we have to be wise with this board, that we clean it off because maybe some of these folk may wander out the back where the church board is and wonder why their names are on the board. And without understanding the situation it could lead to an embarrassing situation. So I think that after the meeting that the names ought to be cleaned off the board. And remember, it never devolves anything in any meeting that would be an embarrassment to someone. Remember that every one of these names are precious to God. And we need to treat them all as a sacred trust.

Now in our prayers I would also suggest that there are three sections. When it comes to prayer, I believe that the very first thing that we ought to do is not to enter upon interceding for someone else or praying for someone else. The very first thing that we ought to do when we come into prayer is to praise God.

Have you ever taken the time and picked up the prayer book of the Bible, the book of Psalms? If you want to read some wonderful prayers just read through the book of Psalms. And the key note of the book of Psalms would have to be the word "praise." Continually David is praising God. And I believe that there's a good reason why David teaches us to praise God. Because as we praise God and repeat and verbalize what God has done for us; and praise Him for it, the devil flees from it. I don't know whether you have ever found that when you pray, when you're kneeling down, maybe beside your bed, maybe somewhere else, and you've prayed and you find that your mind just wanders. Have you ever done what I have done and I'm ashamed to confess it but I've sometimes knelt beside my bed and I have woken up an hour later?

I've fallen asleep. This sometimes happens. But I believe that as we begin to praise God that the devil flees. And you say, What can you praise God? What do you do when you praise God? Do you just say praise God, praise God, praise God? No! You pick up these Psalms and you'll find that David praises God for many, many things. You think about the wonderful things that you have to praise God for.

For example, as we look around the world, the wonderful world that we live in, sure it's marred by sin, sure it has many of the traces of Satan all over it, but there are so many wonderful things. Then I can think of the family that God has given me. And I praise God for them. And I mention them all. "Thank You for giving

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me such a wonderful family.” Then you can thank Him and praise God for wonderful friends. Where would we be today if it wasn’t for friends? Friends that bring us so much joy. Sometimes when we feel down, we go and visit a friend who just lifts us up. And we ought to praise God for that. There are just so many things that we can praise God for. And I think that it is a good thing for us sometimes to make out a little list of all the things that we are thankful to God for and that we can praise His name. And if you spend some time in your prayer in praising God, you’ll find that your mind is clear. And your prayer life becomes a delight.

The second section in our prayer is petitions. After we’ve been praising God in our prayers, it’s then time to bring our petitions before God. We may have certain things that we require, and that we need God to do for us. It’s in this part of our prayer that those petitions ought to be offered up. I think that this is the least important part of our prayer, but nevertheless it is an important part.

Then the third part of our prayer ought to be the intercession in which we take these names, like on this card, and we intercede for those people and pray to God. Just like Moses was interceding on behalf of the children of Israel for them. Remember what he said, “If it’s not possible that these people be saved, then You blot me out.” And I think that we ought to pray to God that God will bless every person that we’re praying for, that as the advertising goes out, as the visit is made, that God’s Spirit would convict that person.

And you know, the tendency so often is to forget to thank God for what He does for us. And so I always like to have as another part of my prayer that we might entitle Thanks in which we thank God for what He has done for us, and the answers to prayer that we’ve already seen. I will suggest that nothing will encourage our Christian experience more than as we begin to see answers to prayer. You know, so often we do see answers to prayer, but we forget about them. They happen, but we don’t always recognize them as such. This will help to build us up spiritually.

Sometimes the tendency is that when we don’t see an answer to prayer or what we think is an answer to prayer we immediately become discouraged and give up. I want to read you of an experience in the book of Daniel, about a great man of God, a man that no sin has been recorded against, Daniel.

Daniel 10:12. “Then he said unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set your heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.”

Now here it says that when Daniel prayed, when were his words heard? Immediately he prayed, from the very first day. But what happened? Did Daniel see the answer to his prayer the day that he prayed?

Verse 13. “But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.”

Now what happened? You see, God was trying to work and answer Daniel’s prayer, but who held him up? Who was stopping Daniel’s prayer from being answered? Well, it says here that it was the kings of Persia. They weren’t too glad to see God’s plan work out and have Daniel’s prayer answered. Who struggled with the kings of Persia does it say here for twenty-one days? God’s messenger. Finally he even had to call on Christ, Michael, to help him. So let us never forget that when we are interceding on behalf of people, if they don’t accept immediately, don’t let us become discouraged. Maybe the messengers of God who are endeavoring to answer our prayers are meeting some opposition. And here Daniel’s prayers were always answered. He’s known as a man of prayer.

Whenever Daniel is thought of, you always think about his praying. And yet in this case it took twenty-one days with the help of Michael to change the minds of the kings of Persia. So in prayer, you see, it’s not a matter of us trying to change God’s heart. That’s not the purpose of prayer. The purpose of prayer is so that we link our lives with God against the devil. Well, I want to read you another verse that will encourage us.

James 5:16. “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The affective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

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And let's never forget that. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Let's underline that. And brethren and sisters, in our work for God this is where our success begins. Because in prayer we bring our hearts into communion with God, and God can then -work through us because we are brought into fellowship with God.

The success of the early church was found in prayer. And I want to encourage you every week to come together and pray together. I'm so saddened as I see that our prayer meetings are so poorly attended. I wish they weren't because possibly that that is an indication of our spiritual growth or lack of it. I think that if we can we can meet at a time that is suitable to the majority. Maybe you would need to choose a time that's suitable to your particular needs in your church.

And then privately, let us take time every day to fellowship with God. I think it would be wonderful if we could set aside, like Daniel did, morning, noon, and evening, and remember the work of God in prayer. Then not only we ourselves become conscious of other's needs, but God will be able to use us. May God bless us as we start and as we plan and as God promises to give us success. Remember that verse again.

Psalm 126:6. "He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

May God bless you and give you an abundant harvest as we work with Him.

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