

This One Thing:
The Example of the Early Church
Acts 1:12-26

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Text Introduction: We are in the middle of a prayer challenge. We are calling our challenge “This One Thing.” This is not only guiding our times together on Sunday morning as we examine the Scriptures about prayer, but we are also challenging one another about our discipline and habits of prayer. And what a time it is to pray. I could not have imagined the importance of this effort when God birthed this in my heart early this summer. But, now, all of this makes perfect sense, right?

I have asked us to take three action steps in addition to coming each week this Fall to Sunday School and Worship.

1. This One Thing—Each week we will have a church-wide specific prayer objective. This week our central prayer objective is praying for an increase in the number of jobs and a rebound in our local economy. So Pray. Pray, every time you pray, for this one thing.
2. Prayer Revival—October 8-11—This is a specific set of days given to prayer. Unlike most revivals where a guest revivalist (evangelist) is enlisted to lead us, we are inviting guest prayer leaders to lead us in prayer. I am asking that you prioritize these dates on your calendar. Protect these dates. Be here those days. Let’s have a prayer revival.
3. A Personal Prayer Commitment—We are unveiling week by week, personal prayer activities. One will capture your attention and you will commit to this being your personal prayer activity. Some are listed in today’s bulletin. If you committed last week, you do not need to turn another form in today. We will talk about some other opportunities next week.

Last week, we examined the prayer example of Jesus. Today, I want us to examine the prayer example of the Early Church. We find that historical record in the Book of Acts. Last week, many of the Scriptures that we looked at were from Luke. Luke was also the author of Acts.

Text: Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying:

Peter, John,
James, Andrew,
Philip, Thomas,
Bartholomew, Matthew,
James the son of Alphaeus,
Simon the Zealot,
and Judas the son of James.

¹⁴ All these were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.

¹⁵ During these days Peter stood up among the brothers—the number of people who were together was about 120—and said: ¹⁶ “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David spoke in advance about Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was one of our number and was allotted a share in this ministry.” ¹⁸ Now this man acquired a field with his unrighteous wages. He fell headfirst and burst open in the middle, and all his insides spilled out. ¹⁹ This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that in their own language that field is called *Hakeldama* (that is, Field of Blood). ²⁰ “For it is written in the Book of Psalms:

Let his dwelling become desolate;
let no one live in it; and
Let someone else take his position.

²¹ “Therefore, from among the men who have accompanied us during the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day He was taken up from us—from among these, it is necessary that one become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

²³ So they proposed two: Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed, “You, Lord, know the hearts of all; show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this apostolic service that Judas left to go to his own place.” ²⁶ Then they cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias. So he was numbered with the 11 apostles.

Introduction: In a book I am reading about prayer called *Forgotten Power: A Simple Theology for a Praying Church*, the author shared a testimony of a pastor. You won’t know his name. In fact, in searching online about the church, he appears to no longer be the pastor, but his testimony resonated with me.

After recounting some of the successes of the church, he writes:

These things have not happened because I’m strong; I’m weak. It’s because the Lord is on the move in our community. We have no specific goals. We have no contemporary strategies. We have no long range plans. We just pray that the Lord of the harvest will stretch forth His hand and bring hungry people to Himself. And every week, people drive past the building, stop, come in, and find Jesus. People visit our prayer meeting regularly, and we have many new families every Sunday....We don’t have a lot of fancy programs and we don’t have it all together. We’re just simple people who trust God. (The pastor’s name is Gordon Meier of Hope Church, which appears to be in Ohio.)

I want to be that church. We are half-way there. We don’t have it all together.

People are said to be praying 31 times in the Book of Acts. Of these 31 times ...

14 times an individual is said to be praying.

2 times two or more people in a small group are said to be praying.

15 times the church is gathered in prayer.

Half of the references to praying in the book of Acts are references to corporate praying!

The praying of the Early Church is marked by several distinguishing characteristics. Taking the early church as our example, as a church, we should pray . . .

About All Things

In chapter 1, the church is praying for the power of the Holy Spirit to fall on them. Later, as we have read in this text, they are praying for wisdom in naming a twelfth apostle to replace Judas. We will come to that in a moment.

In chapter 2, there is a summary statement about their continued devotion to prayer.

In chapter 4, they are praying for boldness in sharing the Gospel after the arrest of Peter and John.

In chapter 6, they are praying about the selection of deacons.

In chapter 12, the church is gathered in prayer for the release of Peter who is imprisoned for the preaching of the Gospel.

In chapter 13, the church is fasting and praying when God moves upon the church to send out missionaries. Before they send these missionaries, they gathered to pray.

In chapter 14, pastors were appointed to churches in prayer.

At every stage in establishment and development of the church, prayer is central. Indeed, they prayed about all things.

In our focus text today, they are continually united in prayer. Then we read about a rather odd activity. But, here is the important thing for us. They earnestly desired to know the will of God. They had been taught that this is how they come to know the will of God. That is our take away about this odd activity.

As they prayed about all things, note this. They prayed about all things,

But the goal of their praying focused on Gospel advance.

This was the focus of their praying.

At All Times

Maybe it is the same thing as praying about all things. But notice the word “continually.” We see the same thing in Acts 2:42. They devoted themselves to several things: teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and to prayers.

This is why Paul wrote so often about unceasing prayer. It was the model of the early church. We do not read of prayer meetings in Acts because all of their meetings were devoted to prayer.

All Together

They prayed together in one place. There is often mentioned a place of prayer (Acts 16:16) and there is indication of an hour of prayer (Acts 3:1)

They prayed together in one voice. (Acts 4:24)

They prayed together in one spirit. (Acts 4:24)

Prayer was the basis of their power, but prayer was the basis of their unity.

Again, just as in a family, when we say “the family that prays together, stays together,” the church that prays together stays together. It is very difficult to remain at odds with those with whom you are praying.

With All Trust

Finally, they prayed with all trust. They believed what they prayed. In chapter 1, they believed God would show them the person. In Acts 4, they believed that God was at work. In fact, Acts 4 shows us the words of their prayer. These words are filled with trust.

In John Bunyan's classic, *Pilgrim's Progress*, two characters named Christian and Hopeful approach the river of death. They ask about the depth of the water and are told, "You shall find it deeper or shallower, as you believe in the King of the place." Christian enters the water and begins to sink. Hopeful responds: "Be of good cheer, my Brother, I feel the bottom and it is good." Christian soon finds solid ground to stand on and "the rest of the River was but shallow."

Anne Graham Lotz notes the difference between belief, faith, and trust: "While belief is the consent of the mind and faith is a choice of the will, trust is a commitment of the heart."

So What?

Prayer is the key. The best strategy we have is prayer.

I am comforted by this. God empowered the Early Church not because they were perfect. In fact they were far from perfect. They got their feelings hurt. They disagreed with one another. They disagreed theologically. They disagreed methodologically. In fact, Paul and Barnabas got so upset with one another over John Mark that they went their separate ways.

They were not a perfect church, but they were a **Praying Church!** Might God do the same today.