

When God's Children Pray

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from Internet sources)

Introduction:

A. Acts 12:1-24

1. Prayer is an unimaginably special privilege. God opens the door to His throne room and invites His children to enter His presence with their petitions - Heb. 4:16.
2. The All-knowing, All-powerful Creator of everything promises to hear us when we call on Him - Jer. 33:3.
3. The God who loves us unconditionally in spite of ourselves promises to answer our prayers when we pray according to His will - 1John 5:14-15.

B. We all have experienced the power of private prayer. There is something special about entering God's presence by ourselves to talk to Him in secret.

1. It is something we should do often.

C. This passage reminds us that there is power in collective prayer.

1. There is something special that occurs when God's children come together united in faith and purpose to seek the Lord in prayer.

I. IT WAS A TIME OF PROBLEMS

A. There were attacks - James the brother of John, one of the Lord's inner circle, was put to death by Herod.

1. Peter was imprisoned and is sitting on death row awaiting execution.
2. The Jews pressed attacks against the early church because they hated the Gospel. Herod persecuted the early church because it gave him a political advantage.

B. There was apprehension - The church did not know what the future held.

C. There was an adversary - Herod killed James and arrested Peter to please the Jews, but they were merely human instruments.

1. Satan hated the church, the Gospel it preached, and the Lord it worshiped. He set out to destroy the church while it was still in its infancy.
2. The church still finds itself under attack from the Adversary. As long as Satan lives in this world, he will do everything in His power to disrupt the harmony and the effectiveness of the church.
3. Only someone who is willfully ignorant or fatally tolerant looks at the church today without seeing the problems we face. We work in a world hostile to the message. Society has no use for us or for the message of the gospel.
4. Financially, numerically, and spiritually, the church in the 21st Century is in deep trouble. Churches that are growing seem to have embraced a more worldly atmosphere and message. Sound churches clinging to the word of God are dying at an alarming rate.
5. If there was ever a day when the church needed to learn to lean on the power of God, it is the day in which we live!

II. IT WAS A TIME OF PRAYER

A. It was fervent prayer

1. Constant or without ceasing is from ektenes - "intent, constant, strenuous, intense; met: earnest, zealous; (an adjective derived from ek, 'wholly out' which intensifies teinō, 'to stretch' which is also the root of English terms, 'tension' and 'tense') properly, stretch out, fully, completely taut; at maximum potential, without slack because fully extended to its necessary outcome; as a medical term, it refers to a stretched ligament or a pulled muscle. It connotes "going beyond the boundaries" (Strong's, Wuest)
2. When applied to prayer, it is a picture of fervency; people pouring out their hearts in prayer before the Lord with all of their strength and will.
3. That's the kind of praying we need to do, energetic and passionate -
 - a. James 5:16

B. It was faithful prayer

1. Heb. 11:6; Matt. 21:22; James 1:5-7

C. It was focused prayer. Peter was the focus of the prayer.

1. They came together to pray for a specific purpose. This was not generalized prayer that tries to cast a big blanket over everything and everyone. This was pointed prayer that sought God's power for a specific need.
2. If we do not pray specific prayers, how will we ever know when God answers? When we ask Him for specific needs, and God answers, it glorifies Him, it assures us of our relationship to Him, and it increases our faith.

D. It was family prayer. The church gathered to pray for one of their own.

1. Their prayers had power because they were united in their walk with God. They joined hearts, minds, and souls; then they lifted their voices to God, and He heard them and moved in power.
2. All those who need our prayers are counting on us. They need us to be specific, and they need us to ask together.
3. Our disagreements hinder our prayers. Our distance limits the power of our prayers. Our self-orientation turns us inward away from each other and away from God

III. IT WAS A TIME OF POWER

A. There was powerful salvation - When the church prayed, God heard them and delivered Peter from prison through an unbelievable, miraculous intervention.

1. God saved Peter when the church asked Him to.
2. God is able to do so much more than we can imagine - Eph. 3:20.

B. There were powerful surprises. When Peter was released from prison and went to the church, no one believed it possible that it could be him.

1. It is not that they didn't believe God could release him, they just didn't think he would do it the way He did
2. As Warren Wiersbe said, "God could get Peter out of a prison, but Peter couldn't get himself into a prayer meeting."

3. Why were they amazed? After all, they had been praying for this very thing, hadn't they? They were surprised because they were just like us.
4. Often prayers are made in an atmosphere of unbelief
 - a. Mark 9:23-24; Matt. 17:20
 - b. Does it trouble us that the success of our prayers on behalf of others may depend on the faith we have when we pray?
- C. There was powerful sovereignty. God gave the church evidence that He is sovereign over everything the church faces.
 1. Sovereign over the opposition. Herod, who dared persecute the Lord's people, dies a horrible death at God's hands. The lesson for the church is to leave their enemies in the hands of the Lord - 1Sam. 17:47
 2. Sovereign over the outreach. As He blessed the church and judged her enemies, God taught a watching world that He was in control.
 - a. The early church learned the lesson that they were not responsible for the success of their ministry; they were merely responsible for being found faithful - Acts 12:24
 - b. If the number board is the criteria for success, then John the Baptist and Jeremiah were dismal failures

Conclusion:

- A. How can we learn to pray as a congregation like the church prayed for Peter?
 1. Stop using memorized clichés and start praying spontaneously from the heart
 2. Examine our hearts and be sure there is nothing in us against another brother or sister in Jesus.
 3. Seek God often as a family.
 4. Call on God in faith, believing Him for all things.
 5. Look beyond our own need and lift up those around us who are in need
 6. Pray about our problems until we see the Lord respond in power.
- B. Something happens when God's people pray. Let's pray together and see what happens.