

Rise Up, O Church of God!

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By Dave Butts

I will always remember November 11, 1997. It was a holiday, so my family and I went to Indianapolis to relax and to do some shopping. After a full day, we went to the airport to pick up some relatives and drive them back to Terre Haute. My mother's brother was waiting there for us. He had driven to the airport to give us the news that my mother had suffered a major stroke earlier that day. Suddenly, getting back home was an urgent matter. We drove quickly home and went straight to the hospital.

Certain things in life can bring a sense of urgency. It may be as mundane as hunger or thirst, or a crisis such as a medical emergency. When circumstances move together to create that urgency, suddenly everything changes. The normal things we do are laid aside and we focus all our attention on fulfilling that which has created the tension or crisis in our life. Urgency causes shifts in priorities and activities. Previously important activities fade into the background.

The Time Is Short

I believe God is calling the Church to a new sense of urgency. It is time to lay aside the normal routine. In one sense, this is the way the Church has been called to live at all times. In another way, this sense of urgency is for God's people today.

The Bible teaches much about time and the Christian's wise use of it. One of the clearest teachings in Scripture regarding time is that it is limited for humans. We only have a

relatively short time to live on this planet. Therefore, it is important that we “make the most of every opportunity.” Consider these passages:

“We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope” (1 Chronicles 29:15).

“You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man’s life is but a breath” (Psalm 39:5).

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Time is considered a gift from God and is intended to be used in a way that brings glory to Him. Ponder these texts:

“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

“Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

“Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity” (Colossians 4:5).

Sometimes this shortness of time is expressed in relationship to the coming of the Lord to bring all time to an end: *“What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn as if they did not; those who are happy as if they were not; those who buy something as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).*

Urgency in the Bible is sometimes connected to both the completion of a task and a passion that connects one to God. I believe the following passage speaks strongly to us today of that situation: *“For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch”* (Isaiah 62:1). Isaiah had begun to sense God’s heart for his people. Through drawing near in prayer, the prophet’s heart was lining up with God’s heart. Many times the Lord had revealed His unfailing love for Israel and His desire for His people to return to Him. Isaiah began to pray the Lord’s agenda...and it was a prayer of passion and urgency.

Making God’s Passion Our Own

It is time today for the people of God to begin to hear God’s heart...so that we may pray with passion about that which God is passionate about. As we draw near to Him in prayer and in His Word, it becomes apparent that there are two things today that ought to bring a strong sense of urgency to the Church: 1) the revival of the Church, and 2) the completion of the task of world evangelization.

God earnestly desires a Bride for His Son who is pure and spotless, and without blemish. This certainly will require a massive change on the part of the Church that could only happen through Heaven-sent revival. This Bride is to be comprised of people from every tongue, tribe, and nation. The revival of the Church and resulting completion of the task of world evangelization come from the very passions of God and require us to take up this task with urgency.

It is time for the Church to begin to pray with the urgency and passion of Isaiah. This time, we pray for the new Zion, the new Jerusalem...the people of God. Like the prophet of old, we too say, *“I cannot remain silent. I will not stop praying for her until her righteousness shines like the dawn, and her salvation blazes like a burning torch”* (Isaiah 62:1). We must

lay aside lesser things. The call is for today. It is a call for the people of God to urgently pray the heart of God for our generation.

“Rise up, O Church of God!
Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and mind and
soul and strength
To serve the King of Kings.”
–William P. Merrill

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Learning to Pray Like the Early Christians

By David Butts

New Testament Christians were praying Christians. The church was born at a prayer meeting on the day of Pentecost, and the disciples continued to pray as they went on their way proclaiming the good news of Jesus around the world. That really shouldn't surprise us. The leaders of the church, the apostles, had gone to Jesus earlier and asked Him to teach them to pray. He did. Then He instructed them to teach others what He had taught them. From Jesus, to the apostles, to the first-century Christians, and down through the years to us, believers have taught and practiced prayer.

As we focus on prayer in the book of Acts, we find that it was a core value of the early church. I doubt they used the term "core value" as we often do today, but the Scriptures indicate that prayer had a place in the key priorities of the church. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). There we find the core values or priorities of the church:

- 1. Apostles' doctrine**
- 2. Fellowship**
- 3. Breaking of bread**

4. Prayer.

Is prayer one of the core values of your church? Certainly we all give lip service to its value, but does prayer really find its way into the nuts and bolts of how you “do church”? In all too many congregations, prayer has become only a way of opening and closing meetings and a means of expressing concern for the sick and hurting. In the book of Acts, believers didn’t simply say that they were devoted to prayer; they demonstrated it by their actions.

Corporate prayer was a major emphasis in the early church. The disciples understood the importance and power of praying together. From the day of Pentecost on, they met regularly for the purpose of prayer:

Acts 1:14 – “They all joined together constantly in prayer.”

Acts 2:42 – “They devoted themselves...to prayer.”

Acts 3:1 – “...going up to the temple at the time of prayer...”

Acts 4:24 – “...they raised their voices together in prayer...”

Acts 12:12 – “...where many people had gathered and were praying.”

Acts 13:3 – “...after they had fasted and prayed...”

Acts 20:36 – “...he knelt down with all of them and prayed.”

If New Testament Christians saw the importance of praying together, shouldn’t we do likewise? Most would agree that it’s a good thing for Christians to pray together, but we must move beyond mere intellectual assent and take specific action steps. We must provide good teaching from our pulpits and classrooms concerning the importance and value of corporate prayer. A wide variety of prayer opportunities need to be offered for the church, focusing on many needs and topics. We need to be less anxious about the numbers who attend these

prayer meetings. A small gathering of three or four people praying can make a real difference.

As we contrast New Testament praying with contemporary praying, it's clear that prayer in the book of Acts was not for outward show. We don't see New Testament Christian leaders coming together to make decisions and opening their discussion with a "word of prayer." Instead, we see Christian leaders coming together who understood that their primary purpose in assembling was prayer. Sometimes out of that prayer time there emerged decisions that would refocus or otherwise impact the entire body of Christ. You see that clearly in the upper room as the disciples met to pray before Pentecost. Though their purpose was prayer, they stopped the prayer meeting long enough to select a replacement for Judas Iscariot. What a difference from many church "elections" today! Those early Christians would agree with Joy Dawson, who wrote, "Have we become so impressed by the world's systems of strategizing that we fail to avail ourselves of the simple method of waiting on God, listening to His voice, praying out His thoughts, and obeying what the Master Strategist says?"

We see a similar result of prayer in the church at Antioch where the leaders of the congregation met to fast, pray and worship. In the midst of their prayers, God initiated an outreach that would take the gospel where it had never been preached before (Acts 13:1-3). That prayer meeting in Antioch released the missionary team of Paul and Barnabas into the world. What impact could our prayer meetings have on reaching the lost?

Let's take a brief look at another prayer meeting in the book of Acts. Acts 4:24-31 gives us a thorough presentation of the events leading up to the prayer meeting, a transcription of what the disciples prayed, and then a description of the awesome results of their prayer. Peter and John had been arrested for preaching, held in jail, and then ordered by the Sanhedrin never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

Upon their release, they returned to the believers and reported the threats made against them. The assembled believers responded by turning the matter over to their Lord in prayer.

They began praying by acknowledging the power of God who created all things. They continued by affirming the truth of Scripture, especially as they saw it being fulfilled in their lives. They quoted the first two verses of Psalm 2 back to God in prayer, and applied those verses to the situation that Jesus faced when spiritual and governmental leaders opposed his ministry. "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One." They also recognized the threats they currently faced as part of that same opposition.

Until this point in the prayer, the disciples had asked for nothing. But in Acts 4:29 they asked for boldness from God to continue preaching the good news of Jesus in spite of the authorities' threats. "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness."

The disciples used Psalm 2 as a beginning place for their prayer by quoting from it, then concluded their prayer request by asking God to fulfill that Psalm in their lives. There's more to the second Psalm than the two verses quoted. In this great Messianic Psalm, God the Father speaks to the Son and says, in verse 8: "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession." In praying for boldness to continue to speak the Word of God, these early Christians were praying Scripture back to God in a powerful way, asking him to help fulfill that promise to the Son through them. Praying the Word of God is a powerful and effective way to make sure our prayers line up with God's desires.

The result of their prayer? The place where they were meeting

was shaken as God showed his pleasure with their request. And that request was answered powerfully, for verse 31 says, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” The same God has the same purpose and desire today: that the ends of the earth might hear the good news of Jesus. And when we, the church today, line our prayers up with the heartbeat of God and ask him to grant us boldness to fulfill his purposes, we too will see his power poured out in awesome ways upon the church of Jesus Christ.

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A Prayerful Response to Terrorism



By Dave Butts

There is no doubt that we live in an age of terror. The threat of terrorism affects us every time we go to an airport, or cast a vote. It affects the policies of nations and the daily lives of individuals. Nations are mobilizing to face this increasingly dangerous threat.

What is the Church's response to terrorism? It certainly affects us. In some places, the Church has been the target of terror attacks. In order for the Church to fully engage this threat, we must see the spiritual aspect of what is happening. Read the following passage of Scripture from Isaiah, and see whether or not it is able to be applied to terrorists today.

"...Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace" (Isaiah 59:6-8).

Terrorism is not merely a matter of physical struggle. It is a spiritual battle as well. This type of blind violence is indicative of Satan's handiwork. Jesus said of Satan in John 8 and 10 that he is a liar, a thief and a murderer. His intent is to steal, kill and destroy. In Revelation chapter 12, the devil is described as he who leads the whole world astray. He

is filled with fury because he knows his time is short.

While in Thailand recently, I heard British prayer leader, Brian Mills, say, "Satan undermines truth, is full of self-importance, has revealed that children are a legitimate target, is vehemently anti-Jewish and anti-Christian, and seeks to interrupt our communication with God, and with one another. In short, Satan is a terrorist! We see a spirit of violence, intrinsic within radical Islam, being turned outwards."

Because the struggle against terrorism is one aspect of the cosmic war between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the prince of this world, Christians must step to the forefront of the battle. As in all of our warfare, prayer becomes a major weapon in our arsenal.

In World War II, Rees Howells and a group of English intercessors gathered together regularly to watch and pray over the major battles and events of the day. There were numerous occasions where God stepped in to show them what must happen even in advance of the events themselves. These faithful intercessors prayed strategic prayers that changed the direction of military events.

It is time today, in our current warfare against terrorism, for the watchmen to again rise up. The Old Testament uses the term watchmen on several occasions to define and describe the actions of intercessors such as Rees Howells and those who prayed with him. The prophet Isaiah cries out, "*I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night*" (Isaiah 62:6).

What do watchmen do?

- They watch and pray.
- They are to be on guard constantly and so provide protection. "*Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of*

the night begin” (Lamentations 2:19).

- They are to listen. Jeremiah 6:17 says, *“I appointed watchmen over you and said, ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet.’”*

- They are to warn. *“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from Me”(Ezekiel 3:17).*

- They are to call on the Lord. *“I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest” (Isaiah 62:6).*

God has called His people to be watchmen. We are not to be passive observers or victims in the war against terror. We are to watch and pray. When we read news, we pray. As we watch television news, we pray. As we engage social media, we pray.

In this kind of battlefield mentality, our prayers must be militant as well. We must pray for a hedge of protection for those on the frontline of battle. We ask God to protect the innocent. It is at times like this that we ask the Lord of the Hosts of Heaven to move out against the enemies of God. We pray that the purposes of God would be fulfilled in the midst of these threats.

Every nation needs watchmen. God is calling us to the walls to watch and pray. Our prayers will make the difference in the fight against terrorism. In the darkness of our current situation, God is calling His people to be light. Through our watchful prayer, we release the powerful light of Christ into the battle. Truly, the battle is the Lord's: *“...This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's’” (2 Chronicles 20:15).*

Additional Reading: [Praying for Our Enemies](#) and [Prayers for](#)

First Responders

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Praying for Unity



By Dave Butts

You can tell a lot about a person by listening to him or her pray. The passions of the heart flow out through prayer and give us a glimpse into the soul. What is really important to a person will find its way into the prayer life of that one. So it was for Jesus as He prayed in John 17. The entire chapter is often referred to as “The great high priestly prayer” of Jesus.

As you study this powerful prayer of our Lord, you can find five basic petitions:

1. Restore Me to the glory I had in heaven.
2. Protect My followers from the evil one.
3. Sanctify them by the truth.
4. May they be one.
5. May they be with Me forever.

I'd like to focus on a point of passion with Jesus. It concerns the fourth petition, "May they be one." It seems to me that Jesus is most passionate about this request. It is this part of the prayer that seems to identify the believer most with both Father and Son. The practical, lived-out unity of the Body of Christ is literally the most powerful apologetic to the world that God had sent Jesus into the world and demonstrated for all eternity the Father's great love for mankind.

New Testament scholar Merrill Tenney writes, "The unity mentioned here is not simply a unity achieved by legislation. It is a unity of nature because it is comparable to that of the Son and the Father. The unity of the Church must spring from the common life that is imparted to all believers by the new birth; and it is manifested in their common love for Christ and for one another as they face a hostile world. The unity of the Son and the Father was manifested in the deep love that each sustained for the other and by the perfect obedience of the Son to the Father and the perfect response of the Father to the Son." (The Gospel of John, Merrill C. Tenney, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Zondervan Publishing, 1981, p.164).

Our passion needs to come alongside that of our Lord's. Should we not join our prayers with Jesus for the unity of all believers? We can discuss the implications and obstacles to unity forever, but the most powerful force toward unity is the same used by Jesus...prayer! How can we pray in an effective way concerning this essential issue in God's kingdom?

Praying Scripture is always my first impulse. It is in praying

the Word of God that we most line up with His thoughts and intents. Would it be possible for us to take Jesus' prayer for unity that we find in John 17:20-23 and make it an integral part of our prayer life? I've taken the words of Jesus and adapted them to our own situation. May they be a blessing to you as you regularly pray back to the Father a similar prayer to the one He heard 2,000 years ago from His only begotten Son.

Holy Father, I lift before You today the scattered followers of Jesus Christ. In the same way that Jesus prayed, not just for the disciples who stood in front of Him as He prayed, but for all who would believe in Him through their message, so I too, do not limit my prayers just to the Christians around me. Lord, there are millions of us now...divided by language, creed, and customs. Our divisions have brought us shame and have hindered the advance of the Gospel.

Father...make us one. In the same way that You and Your Son are one, would You make us one? I don't understand Your unity...how two can be one, and how the Holy Spirit added to that makes the three still one. But in some ways that is reassuring, because I also don't understand how You can make all of us one. It's obvious though, Lord, that our unity is somehow rooted in Your very unity as God. That gives me hope.

Father, in a way that is beyond our comprehension, You dwell in Jesus and Jesus dwells in You. That astonishing unity is what You desire for us by inviting us as believers in Jesus to come to dwell in You. We confess our desire for that as well. We want to live in You. We want to continually experience Your presence...Your oneness.

We are beginning to see that dwelling in You in unity is so amazing that it literally declares to a watching world that You truly did send Jesus into the world. We need a supernatural work of Your Holy Spirit to break down our divisions and to bring us together into Your presence. We long

to see the day when the world wakes up to the realization of Your awesome love that prompted You to send Jesus into the world. Father, make us one that this day might come soon.

Father, as You and Your Son are one, Your presence in Him and His presence in You, we pray the presence of Your Spirit in us will make us one with You and Your Son. And if we are one with You and Your Son, then we certainly become one with each other. You are not divided, Lord. Forgive us for our actions and attitudes that have appeared to divide the Body of Christ.

Would You give us the passion for unity that You and Your Son have? Help us to see how important this issue is to the proclamation of the Gospel. You have loved us as You love Your Son. Please teach us to love each other in that way...people who are different from us in so many ways...yet who are still a part of Your Body. Bring us to complete unity that the world may know of Your astounding love. We ask in Jesus' name.

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6 Simple Ways to Deeper Intimacy with God through

Prayer

“Prayer is both conversation and encounter with God . . . We must know the awe of praising His glory, the intimacy of finding His grace and the struggle of asking His help, all of which can lead us to know the spiritual reality of His presence.” –Tim Keller

When I was getting to know my husband, I wanted to spend as much time with him as possible. I loved having conversations with him about so many different things! Sometimes when we were together, it was enough just to sit, walk or drive somewhere without saying a word.

Amazingly, this is exactly how God feels about us and wants us to feel even more so about Him. Prayer is the key to awakening and strengthening such a deep relationship and desire for the Father.

Here are some simple ways to practice intimacy in prayer as both a conversation and an encounter with God:

Scripture – as you read your Bible, ask God to show Himself to you. Spend some time writing down what God teaches you about Himself as you read/study His word. Know that the God who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8) wants to have relationship with you also! Make God’s word your personal “tent of meeting” (Exodus 33:7) with Him!

Creation – spend time looking around you and paying attention to all that God has created. Pay attention to small things like flowers and birds as well as extraordinary things like mountains, oceans, stars, rainbows and babies! Creation gives us confidence that God is who He says He is. Give Him thanks and praise His glory!

Worship – when you truly worship God, sometimes you can forget why you came to Him. You are able to lay down your list of

needs and wants and just enjoy being in His presence. Simple times of sharing with Him how wonderful and amazing He is will allow your heart to grow closer to His. Find worship music that honors and glorifies the Father and join in!

Listening – most of us want to talk to or at God. Take time to say, as young Samuel did, “Speak Lord, Your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:9)! Write down anything you think you hear. Maybe it will be as simple as “I love you.” Other times it may be something He wants you to do, or something He wants to share with you about Himself. If you aren’t sure if He is speaking to your heart, show a trusted, mature believer what you have written to get confirmation. If it agrees with Scripture and if it is something that is like the character of Jesus, likely you have heard something from the Father.

Silence – there are times when just simply sitting quietly in His presence with no expectations other than just enjoying being with Him can be the most intimate way of developing your relationship with God. No agenda, no wants or needs expressed . . . just being alone with no distractions. Sometimes you can use some quiet worship music. But getting used to sitting with God in silence just as you would with another person you love dearly is a great practice. It’s okay to just be.

Asking – there are times when we have needs—our own, or those of others—that we want to express to God. It’s like saying, “Please, Daddy, I need your help.” In these times, there is no need for flowery language. Just talk to Him as a child sitting in a Father’s lap.

God is continually present in each moment of your life. He has come to live within you always (John 14:23)! Cultivate nearness and affection for Him in prayer. When you draw near to God, He will draw near to you (James 4:8).

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husband, Dave, of [*Vertical with Jesus*](#) and [*Revolution on Our Knees*](#).