

The Early Church's Secret Weapon to Massive Revival

Cry out to the Lord.

Lord, I want to be bold in my witness for You.

I want to see miracles and dramatic conversions in our day.

Make this true of me and more and more of Your people.

Jesus, reset my prayer life.

A growing number of Christians today are aware that something must be known there has to be “more” to the Christian life than what they have experienced. “More” is found through the discipline of prayer. When we begin to pray like Jesus and His early followers, then we will witness the power they experienced.

When I read the book of Acts, I am embarrassed. Why does our brand of Christianity look so insipid compared to the believers of the first century? Where has the power gone? Has God changed, or have we? We’ve all heard the cop-out, “The book of Acts represents a different dispensation.” What a sad, self-serving attempt to excuse our current state of spiritual impotence!

When we read Acts, we should yearn to experience a return to their brand of Christianity. Yet instead of copying them, we seem content with copying other modern churches that are “growing.” But why copy a copy, when you can copy the original (the book of Acts)? In Acts, God was saving people every day. Communities were transformed. People were healed. Demons were cast out. Miracles were commonplace. Churches sprouted up across the Roman Empire. Persecution was faced and overcome. What made them so different?

Our lack of spiritual power in Christianity today is not due to the sermons we preach or the songs we sing. Rather, it is due to our lack of prayer. We do not pray like it matters. Jesus and His earliest followers prayed like it was important. We pray like it is inconvenient or inconsequential. Prayer was their priority. It is our postscript. We plan more than we pray. The Christians of the early church prayed more than they planned. We gather to minister to one another. They gathered to minister to the Lord in prayer and fasting. Our focus is earthly, horizontal. Theirs was heavenly, vertical.

Every prayer we pray is significant. Through our prayers, God changes things. One life dedicated to prayer can do more good than any life dedicated to other so-called "noble," worldly causes. An individual follower of Jesus who is committed to prayer is a fountain of life in a world of death. Likewise, the local church that becomes a house of prayer will be a spiritual powerhouse from which God's mighty miracles will flow exponentially. Prayer is what modern Christians and churches are missing—frequent, fervent, faithful prayer!

Many of us know what it means to minister for the Lord, but how many of us know how to minister to the Lord? Acts 13:2 tells us that the first disciples ministered "to the Lord" (NKJV). What does it mean to minister to Jesus? It means to serve Him, to love Him, to have a vertical focus of priority in relationship with Him. What a different motive for prayer. It's not just something that we should do, it's a part of how we love the Lord!

Pause and allow the Holy Spirit to bring an image of Jesus to your mind and heart. Imagine the scene: Jesus is sitting at the home of His friends, Mary and Martha. He has just experienced rejection in the Samaritan village but has rejoiced over the good reports from the 70 who were sent out (Luke 9:51-56; Luke 10:1-22). Imagine how Mary senses the Savior's sadness about Jerusalem, as well as His celebration for those 70 disciples. Notice Mary. Where is she?

She sits at Jesus' feet—listening to Him. Mary is loving Jesus, ministering to Him. We're shocked to hear Martha's interruption, but also startled by Christ's clear words of affirmation: "Mary has chosen what the good part" (Luke 10:42).

Now imagine that you have the same opportunity to minister to Jesus. In truth, you do! You have this same opportunity to love Him, serve Him and minister to Him in prayer!

He is waiting. He has taken a seat in your home. Sit quietly with a reverent heart. Do not speak at first; just listen. The Savior longs to share His heart. Wait before Him. Listen for His words of pleasure: "You have chosen well."

Now allow the Spirit within you to commune with the Savior. Talk to Him in prayer, but make these moments a two-way conversation. Listen to Him. Wait for His response. Then tell Him the concerns of your heart. {eoa}

*Excerpt from Praying With Jesus. **Steve Gaines** serves as the Senior Pastor at Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, TN and the current president of the Southern Baptist Convention. He has served in four churches as senior pastor over the past 30 years. He holds a Ph.D. in Preaching from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas. Steve is married to Donna Gaines, and they have four children.*