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Becoming Together - V
Praying Together
Acts 2:42-47
March 19, 2017, Jeff Germo

This is sermon number 5 in our series called *Becoming Together*, based on Acts 2:42-47. We've been looking at the four things Luke said the first church devoted themselves to: the apostles' teaching; fellowship; eating together; and finally, the one we are going to look at today, prayer.

I think, likely most people pray in some form or another. Even many who say they don't believe in God have times when they speak to something or someone outside themselves. I may have told the about the Bible study Ruthie and I had in our home in Vancouver for those who were curious about the Christian faith. We invited all kinds of people to the study. I invited some people I met in coffee shops. Ruthie invited some of her students from the ESL classes she was teaching. None of the participants believed in Jesus and at least one of them said she didn't believe in a God of any kind.

She was from China, which has had tight controls on all religious activity for many years. She said that she was an atheist and she was just in our study to practice her English. About half way through our ten week study, she was on her way home one particular day and a car ran a red light and was careening towards her as she was driving through the intersection. She said she saw the car and instinctively screamed out, "O God, help." That's about the simplest prayer you can pray and maybe the most effectual. Somehow, the car completely missed her.

She came back the next week and told us about it and had to admit that, perhaps, she does believe in a God of some kind.

When people are desperate, many times they beg some unseen force to help them, whether or not they believe, intellectually, that there is a God. I believe, and I am assuming most of you believe, that there is one God, the God of the Bible who is the Creator of the universe and everything in it, who completely loves his creation with an undying love, and who revealed himself to us through Jesus and through the written Scriptures.

It is *those* Scriptures that Luke said the first church was devoted to studying from the Apostles. Let's take a look at our passage one more time and then I would like to read several passages about prayer from the New Testament to make sure we are praying as we should.

To set the scene, once more, this is a gathering of the first church after Jesus had been crucified, raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven. The Holy Spirit came on them in power so they could be his witnesses, as Jesus promised. Peter preached his inaugural sermon to a huge crowd of mostly Jewish people about the fact that Jesus was the Messiah that they had been waiting for, for hundreds of years — and that they had crucified him. Three thousand of them believed and were added to their number and baptized on that one day. Then Luke tells us what those first disciples of Jesus spent their efforts on.

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Acts 2:42–47 (NLT)

⁴² All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. ⁴³ A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. ⁴⁴ And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

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⁴⁵ They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

So, these first followers of Jesus devoted themselves to four things.

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- 1. The Apostles Teaching**
- 2. Fellowship**
- 3. Eating Together**
- 4. Prayer**

Let's remind ourselves that the reason they devoted themselves to each of these four things was to further the mission of Jesus, to make disciples; to lead people to become committed followers of Jesus Christ. *That* is why they gathered. *That* is what the Apostles taught. *That* is what they fellowshiped around. *That* is why they ate together. And *that* was the main object of their prayers.

The first church gathered together, enjoying each others' company, fellowshiping, eating together, sharing everything they had, and praying together, mostly for the purpose of winning their community over to the cause of Christ. They were a part of God's great rescue mission.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't pray about other things. We should. Paul said we should pray about everything. There are times when our hearts and minds are filled with anxiety about our life and it's hard to focus on anything other than the thing we are worried about right now. Can anyone relate to that? I think we all can. Here's what the Apostle Paul said to do in cases like that.

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Philippians 4:6–9 (NLT)

⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

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⁸ And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. ⁹ Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

When things are not going well for us, we are tempted to focus our hearts and minds on the thing that is going wrong at the moment. That's a very normal for all of us. If we are experiencing financial difficulty, it is very hard to not think about how we are going to make ends meet. If we have a relationship problem, our thoughts go there. That is normal. We all do that. We lose our peace. It's hard to shake it from our minds. Health is another thing we can worry about, either for ourselves, or for someone we love.

Money, relationships, and health are the three biggies that we worry about. There are other things, but I think those are the big ones.

What's Paul's remedy? First, he says, "Don't worry." Easier said than done. As soon as we try to not worry about something we focus on it even more and hence, we worry more. The thing then becomes bigger in our minds. A little thing can become mammoth in our minds. The interesting thing about most of the things we worry about is that they are usually something we *think* might happen in the future. We

worry about things that have yet to happen. We project some disaster into our future. They become so big in our minds that we are afraid to face them.

Now, there are some things that are huge and scary, like cancer. That is scary for anyone. But, the truth is, many of the things we worry about are much smaller, and we make them bigger in our minds than they really are. They cast a huge shadow into the future of our minds.

So, Paul says,

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⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

1. Don't worry anything. 2. Pray about everything, and then 3. Thank God for everything.

Paul said, if we do these things God will give us his peace. But, wait! There's more.

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Then he says, instead of focusing your minds and hearts on the thing you are worried about, which will make it bigger in your mind, focus on other things; things that are true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Why? Because **when we focus too much on our problems they take up all the space in our minds, and we get distracted from the mission of Jesus.**

We have an enemy. He is called the accuser of the brethren. Revelation 12 says that Satan is at work day and night accusing you. Day and night. 24/7! He is telling lies. He is trying to get you to believe lies about yourself in order to defeat you. He's telling you things like God doesn't really care about you. He cares about other people, but not about you. He is telling you that you are worthless. Night and day, he is accusing you in an attempt to cause you to give up and be demoralized.

He is telling you lies about others, attempting to cause disunity in your relationships. He is also telling you lies about God, trying to break down your trust in him. Night and day he is accusing you and pointing his finger. We are in a spiritual battle and what he wants to do is to get us to take our eyes off Jesus and on to our problems and insecurities in order to distract us from the mission of Jesus. If he can do that he wins. That is one of the reasons we need to pray. That is why we need to take every thought captive and focus our hearts and minds on the right kinds of things.

I am going to read several passages of Scripture on prayer and make a few comments along the way and then I will lead us in corporate prayer. As we read these Scriptures notice what the main focus of Paul's prayers were.

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Colossians 4:2–4 (NLT)

² Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. ³ Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. ⁴ Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should.

What was Paul's concern here? His main concern in this prayer was for the mission of Jesus; to lead others to become committed to the mission of Jesus. Notice that he is not asking God to get him out of prison. He is praying ***"that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. ⁴ Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should."***

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1 Timothy 2:1–6 (NLT)

¹ I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. ² Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. ⁵ For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. ⁶ He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time.

What is the focus of Paul's prayer here? That more people would get to know Jesus through us. That is why the church exists. That is what most of our prayers should focus on. What do most of your prayers typically focus on? Do you pray for your neighbours who don't know Jesus? Do you pray that God would give you open doors and show you how to love those around you? What do you mostly pray about?

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Philippians 1:3–6 (NLT)

³ Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴ Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵ for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. ⁶ And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

What's the focus of Paul's prayer here? That God would finish his work of spreading the Good news of Jesus through us; that we would never stop growing in Jesus.

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Colossians 1:3–14 (NLT)

³ We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people, ⁵ which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.

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⁶ This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your lives from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace. ⁷ You learned about the Good News from Epaphras, our beloved co-worker. He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us on your behalf.

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⁸ He has told us about the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you. ⁹ So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. ¹⁰ Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.

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¹¹ We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, ¹² always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, ¹⁴ who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.

What's the focus of this prayer? The life changing power of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

What Satan would like to do is get us so distracted or discouraged that we turn our focus inward instead of outward. It's not that we shouldn't pray for ourselves. We should. But, we should not let our problems distract us from what God wants to do through us, which is lead others to know Jesus.

What he wants to do is use everything we are going through to bring glory to Jesus so more people get to know him through us. What difficulty are you going through right now? God wants to use that for your good and his glory.

Look at what Paul said to the Philippians:

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Philippians 1:9–14 (NLT)

⁹ I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹⁰ For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. ¹¹ May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

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¹² And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. ¹³ For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

What was the context of this letter? Paul was in prison. He wasn't whining and complaining about his circumstances. He wasn't asking the Philippian church to commiserate with him. What does Paul say really matters? His only concern was that God would be glorified through his life, no matter what he was going through. His goal was that the Good News of Jesus would be spread through whatever he was going through, that others would get to know Jesus *through* his trial. That gave purpose to his suffering.

What are you going through right now that's tough? Are there things that are confusing? I know some of you are going through some pretty painful and stressful stuff. When we go through tough times we sometimes ask, "Why is God allowing this to happen to me?" Have you ever done that? Sometimes we have no idea how to pray.

Here's what Paul said to the church in Rome:

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Romans 8:26–28 (NLT)

²⁶ And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. ²⁷ And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. ²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

No matter what you are experiencing in your life right now, God is able to use it for your good and his glory. What are you going through? Is it financial difficulty? God want wants to use that for your good and his glory. Is it a relationship problem? How could God use this for your good and his glory? Pray to that end. Whatever it is that is tempting you to take your eyes off Jesus is what he wants to use to bring you closer to him so others would see Jesus in you.

The enemy of your soul, Satan, your accuser, wants to get your focus off Jesus, on to your problems and your shortcomings and failures, so he can defeat you. Don't let him. The only weapons he has are lies and half truths.

Here is the truth Paul prayed for the Ephesian church:

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Ephesians 3:16–21 (NLT)

¹⁶ I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. ¹⁷ Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. ¹⁸ And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

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¹⁹ May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. ²⁰ Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. ²¹ Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

What is the main focus of this prayer? That we would understand just how much Jesus loves us so we will be made complete. The more we know the love of Jesus the more complete we become. We feel fragmented at times because we don't really understand how much we are loved. We feel incomplete because we don't really understand just how much we are loved. We look around desperately for people to accept us because we don't really understand how much we are loved. We get distracted from the mission of Jesus because we don't really understand how much we are loved.

If we don't understand just how much God loves us we will desperately try to justify our existence in so many unhealthy ways. What tends to happen then is that we get distracted from the real reason God has us here, to take the mission of Jesus to Campbell River. To love our neighbours so they can meet Jesus.

Last week Callista sent me a video from Bravehearted Christian Ministries¹ about intercessory prayer. I want us to watch that video in a couple minutes.

The word intercession basically means to stand in the gap. When we intercede for others, we stand in the gap for them.

Think of a brick wall and the mortar that fills the gaps between the bricks. If that mortar crumbles so there are gaps in the wall, the structure becomes weakened. There is a breach in the wall that is open to attack. What Satan, the enemy of our souls, the accuser of the brethren, does is look for those gaps. He finds where we are weak. He will accuse us and tell us lies about ourselves, about God, and about others in an attempt to discourage us and throw us off our stride so we get distracted from the mission of Jesus.

If he can get us to feel bad about ourselves so we focus inward instead of outward, he wins. If he can get us to just think about our own comfort, instead of lost people around us, he wins. Sometimes, there are gaps in the walls of our lives and we need others to fill those gaps for us by interceding to God on

¹ <https://braveheartedchristian.com>

our behalf. We need to be okay being not okay and let others pray for us. At other times we will need to stand in the gap for them.

We must remember that the main goal of the enemy is to knock us off our stride so we take our eyes off the mission of Jesus. Watch this video.

[21-[Video](#)]²

For the remainder of our time this morning I would like us to pray corporately. I am going to lead you through the ACTS acronym.

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- 1. Adoration**
- 2. Confession**
- 3. Thanksgiving**
- 4. Supplication**



Becoming Together - V
Praying Together
Acts 2:42-47
Week of March 19, 2017

Objective of this study: To seek God in prayer so his mission can be accomplished through us.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 86:1-13** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

In what situations do you feel closest to God: in nature; at home alone with your Bible; at church; when you are talking with a loved one about real heart issues; other...?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

5. What stood out from the sermon?
6. Break into pairs or small groups. Divide up the following Scripture passages and then regroup and report on what the main emphases are for each passage:
 - (1) Colossians 1:3-14
 - (2) Colossians 4:2-4
 - (3) 1 Timothy 2:1-6
 - (4) Philippians 1:3-6
 - (5) Philippians 1:9-14
 - (6) Philippians 4:6-9
 - (7) Ephesians 3:16-21

Work (30-45 minutes)

Take the rest of the time and focus on praying for each other. Pray through the A.C.T.S. Acronym.

1. **Adoration**
2. **Confession**
3. **Thanksgiving**
4. **Supplication** - [Be sure to have an outward focus in your prayers. Who is the Holy Spirit laying on your heart to reach out to with the love of Jesus.]