**Devoted**

**Acts 2:42** “They **devoted** themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

**Vision statement:** (Common-unity)

Ground zero church is an Acts chapter two style of community of disciples who seek to reflect the character of Christ by cultivating friendships and embracing all believers as family.

**Devoted to Prayer**

1. **Pray without ceasing**

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

 When I think of devoting ourselves to prayer, this is the first verse that comes to mind. Specifically the part where Paul instructs the early church to “Pray without ceasing”. This verse is close to my heart for two reasons. One of the reasons is because it reminds me of an inside joke we share in our family. One Holiday many years ago, We had a family member slip up when they referenced this verse. Rather than say pray without Ceasing they advised us all to pray without cussing. While this is excellent advice, I don't think that is what the Apostle Paul was talking about. Everytime my family hears this verse, there is now a little giggle associated with it.

1. **What does it mean to pray without Ceasing?** To Cease means to bring to or come to an end. So pray without coming to an end. Some translations just say pray continually. This does not mean that you should pray out loud all of the time, especially not in public. That would be strange and people might look at you funny. Instead of praying with your tongue, pray with your mind. When you center your thoughts on Jesus it has an effect on you. When I wake up in the morning, I play christian music and open the scriptures while I eat my breakfast. This centers my mind for the day. When I go mountain biking, I begin with prayer and I will ask the Lord to center my thoughts on him during my ride. This causes me to stop more frequently and enjoy his creation. It gives me a sense of peace. Though I am isolated from all people on a mountain somewhere, I have never been closer to the Lord and I enjoy sweet fellowship with him wherever I am. I will keep an open dialogue with him sometimes out loud and sometimes in my head. I do the same thing when I go to work at my part time job or when I am doing any other activity. This is what I believe Jesus was talking about when he tells us to abide in him.
2. **Abide**

(Include John 15:5 & Galatians 5:22-23 in the same slide if you can please)

 **John 15:5 “**I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

 **Galatians 5:22-23 “**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

We need to Abide in Jesus as a branch abides in the tree. If you break the branch from the tree, you will see all the little fibers that were connected to the tree. The branch is not just connected to the tree, it is one with the tree. The tree is the one who bears the fruit. The branch by itself cannot bear fruit unless it is connected to the tree. Are you abiding in Christ in this way? Or are there fibers of your life that are not one with Christ?

Do you bear much fruit? Many christians bear some fruit. But only those who abide in Jesus, bear much fruit. Praying without ceasing is part of how we abide in Christ.

1. **Praise and thanksgiving**

**Psalm 100:4** “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!”

There is a reason we put praise & prayer together every Sunday. Psalm 100:4 is a very important verse to remember when we pray. Our prayers should start with praise & thanksgiving. We are entering into the courts of a holy God who is worthy of all our praise. He has done great things and we all have a lot to be thankful for. When we pray this way it adjusts us and our prayers and begins to align us with the will of God. Praise may seem hard to do when we are going through some lifes trails but praising the lord in the midst of our trails is how we receive the power to overcome them. I have had many trails in my life as you have too. Each time I have gone through a trail. It did my heart so much good to praise the Lord for his goodness in the midst of it. Praise allows us to see God working in the midst of pain and fear. Praise increases our faith. We see this template of praise first in the Lord's prayer and we see the Apostle Paul model this for us as well. Not only does he tell the church of Thessalonica to

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;”

 But he models it in many of his letters to the early churches. He starts out with thanksgiving, even in some churches such as the church in Corinth. He was getting ready to reprimand them yet he still began with thanksgiving.

Though our trails may be long and hard. Thanksgiving gives us the strength to pull through. One practice I have used is to thank the Lord for the Many blessings and the mini blessings. You will find that you have many mini blessing to be thankful for.

1. **Pray for each other**

**Galatians 6:2 “**Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the “law of Christ” Paul is referring too. In this section of scripture, Paul is Writing to the Church in Galatia and instructing them to correct and restore those who have been caught in sin. He speaks of this as being a burden. The idea is that it's not just okay to let someone go astray. Even though it is a burden to go through the process of restoring a brother, Those who live according to the spirit should correct them gently. He also says that we should not become conceited and should bear our own load as well. It is just as easy for us to become caught in sin as it was for them.

**Galatians 6:5 “**For each will have to bear his own load.”

 I believe these same instructions can be applied to how we pray for each other. When we pray we are carrying each other's burdens. We should pray for each other when we are caught in sin, when we are hurting or sick or when we are sad or even when life is good so that we do not become conceited. This is part of loving your neighbor as yourself. I want to highlight one part that is often missed in this command. It is common for well meaning christians to not bear their own load in prayer. We should request prayer for ourselves and we should not feel ashamed of it. The Apostle paul would frequently request prayer from the church.

# **1 Thessalonians 5:25**

#  “Brothers, pray for us.”

So should we. God wants us to ask for the things that we need but the devil does not. He will shame you for requesting prayer for yourself. He will say things like, how dare you! Don't you see all the other people that need prayer worse than you. Stop whining and suck it up, it's not that bad. This is a lie from the pit of hell. If this is you you are not obeying the command of Jesus to Love your neighbor as yourself. If you do not love yourself, you will not love your neighbor. If you hate or neglect yourself you will love your neighbor to the same degree that you love yourself. Pray for the things that you need and request prayer for yourself out of love for yourself and your neighbor. That is Jesus’ command

**Matthew 22:36-39** “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”