

Different To Make A Difference

Pray Desperately – Part 2

Dr. David Platt

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PRAY DESPERATELY – PART 2 **Acts 2:42**

One of my favorite biographies is about a guy named George Woodfield. Woodfield was a preacher in the 18th century along with John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards who were part of what was called the 18th century revival, became known as the First Great Awakening. Just a biography detailing how this guy played such a pivotal role in seeing the Spirit of God awaken churches all over the American colonies as well as in England, France, Scotland. How they saw God move in just amazing ways through the preaching of these guys.

This is a guy who would preach without use of a microphone to 20 or 30,000 people at a time. That's quite a voice. 20,000 people? This is less than 2,000 in here, I've got this nice cool, whatever kind of mic this is and he did it without that, just the Spirit of God strong upon this guy.

I remember reading one story in that biography about how he'd be sailing from Britain over to the United States and there were two ships that were going, and he got on one of them, most of these sailors, anti-Christian, wanting nothing to do with Christ and mocked him. Really didn't want him on the boat with them. The story's told that by the time they got over near the coast of the United States on Sunday morning they would bring the boats as close as they could to each other, Woodfield would stand out on the mast on one of them and he would preach to both boats, the Gospel, because most of them had come to faith in Christ.

Just used mightily, by the Spirit of God to bring about revival and awakening, the first great awakening. What's interesting though, is at the very beginning of this biography, Woodfield's biographer talks about how the 28 years before the 18th century, end of the 17th century, it was a time of great persecution among the churches of England and Puritans, devote followers of Christ were taken from their homes. Leaders and pastors of churches thrown into prison. They said what happened was guys like John Bunyon and others, for about 20 years were thrown into prison, commanded not to preach the Gospel, forbidden to preach the Gospel so they were stuck in prison. And for 20 years all they could do was pray.

Woodfield's biographer said one of the primary reasons we saw such an outpouring of God's good in the 18th century is because at the end of the 17th century, he had a bunch of church leaders who had nothing to do but to pray. I read that went I was coming on faculty to teach at New Orleans Seminary and I started thinking, what would happen if we took a semester off and we just prayed? Or a year, or two years, or five years and we just prayed?

This morning, we're going to take all of our time to pray. Preachers going to be quiet for the most part, the preacher's going to be quiet, and we're going to spend concentrated time in prayer today. And some of you may not have been a part of a service like this. In fact I was talking with my wife Heather this past week, and we can't remember a time where we were in a Sunday morning service that was completely devoted to prayer, but that's what we're going to do.

If you really wanted to hear a sermon, the one from last week was over an hour so you can go back and get that one again. But this morning, we're going to come before God and we're going to pray together as a faith family. We're going to say you know it's easy for us to sit through a two hour movie, certainly we can spend the next hour plus that we have together, committed to prayer. And so we're going to have a time where we pray for each other, pray for the world around us, intercede to pray on behalf of others.

But before we dive into that, I think it would be most appropriate for us in light of what Scripture tells us about the New Testament Church and the role of communion that we see in the last few weeks here in our church. The first, before we begin to intercede for others, we're going to look at the Savior who interceded for us.

You see for someone to intercede, to pray, an intercessory prayer basically means to stand in the gap between two people. That's an interceding. And so when Jesus went to the cross, the Bible says He interceded on our behalf. He stood before God who's holy. In between God and man who was sinful, and He made the way for us to come to God. That's what it meant for Him to intercede for us.

In just a second we're going to talk about how we intercede for others in prayer. But first we need to realize that the God of the universe became a man to intercede on our behalf, and to allow us to be forgiven of all of our sins. So we're in just a second going to have communion to start off our time in prayer today. And I want to invite you, before we even begin to pray for each other and begin to pray for those around us, I want to invite you right where you're sitting to spend some time in personal reflection. In thinking about your own sin, thinking about any areas of your life that you come in here with today that are not honoring to God. I want to invite you into a time where we remember the body and the blood of Christ that were shed so that Christ would intercede on our behalf. And we're going to have a time where we personally spend time with the Lord in prayer, and that's going to launch us into interceding on behalf of the world around us. So let me invite you to bow your heads with me.

God we, we want to be a church that's devoted to prayer. And we pray that you would teach us to pray today, together as a faith family. And God we pray that you would lead our prayers, that you would guide our prayers, that your Spirit would lead our time together. And that we would come into contact with you and your greatness and your power, and intercede on behalf of the needs of those around us. God we thank you for this time that we're about to celebrate in communion where we acknowledge the fact that you have interceded for us. God I pray that across this room, that we would take off our masks and come honestly before you and that today in this room before we go any further, that you would reveal any areas of our lies that are not right with you. That as we confess our sins, you would be faithful and just and you would forgive us of our sins, and you would cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Thank you, Jesus for interceding on our behalf. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

I'm going to invite those who are serving communion to make their way to these tables. In just a second they're going to begin passing these out. If you are not a Christ follower, and you're here this morning, we invite you just to observe during this time, let that bread just go to the person next to you, or the cup go to the person next to you. But if you are a Christ follower as God leads you, once you have the bread and the cup, at your own pace, we won't all do this together, you spend some time in personal reflection and prayer, and then once you've reflected on the meaning of the body and the blood of Christ in your life and confessed any areas of your life that are not honoring to Him, then I invite you at your

own pace to take the bread and the cup, and this is how we're going to begin our time devoted to prayer today.

Acts 2:42 says they devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Think about how prayer affected the rest of this passage that we've been studying. *"Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles"* (Acts 2:43), we see them praying for those things to happen later on. *"All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need"* (Acts 2:44-45). Prayer at the center of the way they supported one another. *"Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people"* (Acts 2:46-47). Prayer was at the center of their community. In all that, and *"the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved"* (Acts 2:47).

This community that we've seen in the early church that cared so much for each other, that sacrificed and sold possessions to give to each other. Why did they do that? What drove them to do that? Well when you're praying for each other, when you see needs in your interceding between God and those needs then God leads you to sell your property and give to the poor. God leads you to do those things. Prayer was at the center of the way they interacted with each other.

And so I want us to go into a time of intercession for most of the rest of our time together today. Now I'll be honest, it's going to stretch you a little bit, so just kind of be prepared. We're going to have some times where we pray as individuals, but we'll also have some times where we pray in small groups, just with the people right around you. And I don't want you to feel uncomfortable in the sense that you would be put on the spot to be praying in front of 2,000 people, that's not going to happen. We're not going to ask you to do that. And even if you don't feel comfortable in a small group around you, that's okay, just don't pray during that time, that'll be fine.

But, I want us to stretch ourselves in a culture where everything is go go go, entertain, entertain, entertain. What does it mean to come together and just intercede on behalf of each other and behalf of the world around us?

This is an incredible task we have; we see it all throughout Scripture. Moses stands before the people of God and prays God do this among the people over and over and over again. Nehemiah stands before God on behalf of His people to build the walls. Isaiah stands before God on behalf of the nation they were about to get attacked by Assyria. Isaiah intercedes and the armies of Assyria all of a sudden turn back. Paul constantly interceding on behalf of the churches around him. And it's a privilege we have to do this.

So, I want us to pick up where we left off last week. You may remember, we all across this room wrote down ways we could pray for each other on cards and we brought them down here to the front. I want to invite you to take your celebration guide that you received when you came in today. And some of you may have already noticed or maybe you haven't, but there's a card in there that has a prayer needed from someone last week that's in your celebration guide. And so from the outset, I want to invite us into a time to intercede for each other. You have no clue who wrote down that prayer request, but God knows exactly who wrote down that prayer request and now it's in your hands, and you have the privilege to intercede on their behalf.

And so for the next couple of minutes I want to invite you to pray for what is written on that card. Maybe think of some Scriptures to pray for that person, and just pray specifically for the need that's represented there. I want to invite us to begin today to intercede on behalf of each other just as we see in the early church. You take the next minute or two and pray specifically for what's written on that card, and all across this room will be lifting up prayers to God on each other's behalf. You can pray out loud or you can pray in silence, whatever you would like to do. You just pray as God leads you for what's on that card in the next minute or two.

We invite you to stay in the groups where you are, read from Acts 3, it's a passage we've studied a few weeks ago.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, 'Look at us!' So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.' Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God (Acts 3:1-8).

This whole picture inaugurated by the fact that Peter and John went into the Temple to pray. Going into their community to pray and what happens in this passage is they begin to see this man the way God sees this man. I want you to see how intercession doesn't just change the way circumstances are around us. Intercession changes us because when we pray for people, we begin to see God's heart for people, we begin to feel what God feels, we begin to see with God's perspective. And so as we think about them going into their community to pray, in our groups, what I'd like us to do is to pray for our community, to intercede on behalf of this world called 280 in Birmingham and everything that it represents. And I want to invite us in these groups that we're in, and if there's somebody who may not have somebody near the, feel free to invite them to be a part of praying with you.

But I want to invite you to pray for our community here in Birmingham, pray for our families, pray for the neighborhoods we live in, pray for our children, for students, for schools. And help us to pray for the schools that are in this community, teachers, to pray for civil leaders in Birmingham, to pray for needs that are represented around this community. To pray for the inner city in Birmingham. To pray for what's going on in this world around 280, to intercede on behalf of the people in our community, the neighborhoods we live in. And I want to invite you just somebody can start in that group, and again please don't feel obligated, if you don't feel comfortable praying in that group that's fine, out loud, but across this room, let's lift our voices together and intercede in groups for the people in our community. Just like we see happening in Acts 3 and maybe God will begin to help us to see Birmingham with His perspective instead of our perspective. Let's pray for our community.

As you finish praying in your groups, and you make your way back to where you were sitting, I want to read to you from Acts 10. Another time when the church prayed. "About noon," verse 9 says, "the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray" (Acts 10:9). Basically the rest of this chapter talks about how Peter encountered God at his praying. Up until this point Peter a Jewish person,

wanted nothing to do with the Gentiles. Basically all the other people around him who were not Jewish, they were looked at as unclean, heathens, didn't spend time with them. You kind of wring your hands in pious concern and you walk away from the Gentiles. And God in this time in prayer begins to turn Peter upside down so at the end of chapter 10, Peter says, "I now see, I now understand that God does not show favoritism and He looks with favor and grace, and mercy upon Jew and Gentile alike."

And Peter's intercession led to the first Gentiles coming to faith in Christ. Which opened the door for the rest of the book of Acts to tell us about the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. And it happened through this time that Peter had in prayer.

I want us to liken that as we have this time in prayer today to situations we find ourselves in. Most of us are not Jewish in this room with turning a deaf ear to the Gentiles around us, however, we are a people that are surrounded day in and day out, week in and week out with social concerns, with needs, with current events around us. That God has called us to intercede for. God has called us to stand in the gap for the needs we see around us in the world. We have so much access to these needs, we see them as we browse the internet and look at news headlines as we open up the paper and we browse through the pages there. As we turn and flip through, turn on the TV and flip through the channels and we see FOX news or CNN and we see what's going on in the world.

And the wrong response to that is the response we most often have, we flip through the channels, then we turn it off and say what's going wrong in the world today? Or we browse through these major concerns in the world that are on the front page of the paper to get to the back to the sport section to see how our team is doing. And we become a people very quickly that are just like Peter, turning a deaf ear to the needs of the world around us when God has called us to be intercessors on behalf of the world around us.

What happens in a church when a people stop flipping through the channels, and look at the needs that are represented there and fall on their faces and begin to take up the privilege of intercession for what's going on in the world. It's a whole new version of Christianity that erupts. And it's Biblical because you begin to see the place all of us in this room who are Christ followers have in interceding for the needs of the world around us.

And what happens is, just as we talked about in the community, just as we see in Peter, we begin to see the world the way God sees the world. We begin to see with His perspective and it begins to change our lives.

So in just a second, what you're going to see on the screen are different news headlines from this last week. Current events, social concerns, represented from just this last week. And as individuals across this room, I want to invite you to engage those news headlines in prayer. What I mean by that is I want you to look up there and you're going to see them, and they'll be rotating and they'll come back around, so look up there, identify a headline and then pray for that. And intercede on behalf of what's going on in the world in that particular situation. And then once you finish interceding for that, then look up again and there'll be another one up there, and intercede for that. And do this this whole time, and we're going to do is all across this room, we're going to actively engage God interceding on behalf of the needs of the world and we are going to stand in the gap by devoting ourselves to prayer. You watch up here on the screen and once you see these headlines, then you pray, then look up and see another one. And for a few minutes, we're just going to pray on behalf of the needs in the world around us.

I hope we're seeing what a privilege this is, to the casual bystander this would look like a boring, slow exercise, but ladies and gentlemen we have the opportunity right now to be a part of what God is doing in Iran with our prayers. Is that awesome or what? That you have opportunity and the privilege to affect New Zealand, and Lebanon, and Israel, and Palestine, amidst the conflict that's going on there, as we stand in the gap on behalf of the needs of the world. There is no greater privilege than this. The early church knew that, so they devoted themselves to prayer, because they knew you don't sit back oddly by in prayer, it's not a casual boring thing, this is something you are engaging the front lines in.

And so two chapters later we find themselves, we find the early church again in prayer. Here's what they were praying for, it's a passage we read last week.

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him (Acts 12:1-5).

The church earnestly praying to God because one of their brothers was in prison.

Ladies and gentlemen there are thousands of our brothers and sisters who are in prison today, right now, because of their faith in Christ. The question is, is the church earnestly praying to God for them?

As we intercede, God knows that our brothers and sisters in chains need us on our faces before God, on their behalf. That's why Paul constantly said when he was writing letters from prison, pray earnestly to God that I may proclaim the Gospel clearly as I should in the middle of persecution. When they gather together to pray, they prayed amidst a persecution they faced.

So in just a second, on the screens, you're going to hear from the languages of our brothers and sisters overseas. Them sharing about what's going on in their country. And as you hear, you'll hear for a couple of minutes the state of persecuted believers in that particular country, and then you'll see a list of things come up on the screen that we can pray for them for. And I want to invite us into time where we intercede, just imagine, we're interceding for brother of ours in Christ who now is sitting in a jail cell in North Korea, or who's in hiding in Saudi Arabia, or for believers who are going right now to an underground house church in China, and we have the opportunity to join them. By the way we pray, as you see these things on the screen, don't think that you just have to bow your heads to pray you can pray as you're reading, just pray the whole time. As you read about these needs, as you see them in front of you, let's call out to God on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are in chains. You watch these and let's pray together for them.

So the church earnestly prayed to God for Peter, and then the beginning of the next chapter, we see a whole new tone. *"In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:1-2).*

So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. So the church not only gathered together for prayer but fasted, and Saul and Barnabus off. So basically launch the mission's movement of the church to reach unreached people's with the gospel.

In chapter 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 over and over again, they're going to new places that have had no exposure to the name of Jesus. They're proclaiming the Gospel and people are coming to faith in Christ. All inaugurated by devoted prayer.

And so we prayed, we interceded on behalf of our persecuted brothers and sisters, now, let's intercede on behalf of people in our world who still don't know the name of Jesus. There were people like that in Acts 13. And ladies and gentlemen, there's still a billion like them in the world in 2006. Let it soak in.

Over 1 billion people who haven't even heard the name of Jesus. Much less given their life to Him. Feel the weight of a billion souls in prayer. We have the resources no doubt to make the Gospel known to the ends of the earth. God help us to be a people who pray that He would use us to do it. That He would give us the nations. And so in just a second members of our faith family are going to share with you a little bit about a few different people, of groups, and have no exposure to the gospel today. And just as you interacted in praying for persecuted brothers and sisters, we're going to interact and we're going to pray for people groups that have never heard the name of Jesus. And I want to remind you back in 2:14, the glory of the Lord is going to fill all the earth like water covers the seas.

And I remind you that Psalm 46:10 says, *"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among all the nations, I will be exalted in all the earth."* He's going to be exalted among all the people's; He's said that in His Word, "therefore whatever you ask in my name will be" what? Given to you. And church leaders in conversation within this last week say, "You know when we heard you in the spring talking about making the gospel known among the nations and impacting the world we thought it was a little ambitious. Now we see it's God Word and it can happen through us."

So let's pray on behalf of these people, and let's pray that God would reenact Acts 13 at the church of Brook Hills and send us out to make the gospel known among them. Let's pray for these unreached peoples who have never heard the gospel, that they would know the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters covered the seas.

You know it's really interesting about praying for unreached peoples? It's hard to pray God open a door for them to hear the gospel, because the doors are already open. It's hard to pray God make the Scriptures known in their language because that opportunity is already there. When you pray for unreached peoples, you end up realizing we have everything we need to make the Gospel known among the Sitar, and the Qui in Cambodia. We have everything we need to make the Gospel known among the Sudanese Arab people who are fighting amongst each other and hundreds are dying in western Sudan. We have everything it takes, and it gives whole new meaning to Jesus coming on the scene and saying the harvest is plentiful, the problem is, the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest pray then for yourselves, pray the Lord of the harvest would send out workers into His harvest field. And when we begin to pray with God's heart for unreached people who begin to see that we really need to be praying for us, that God would wake us up to see the needs around us and compel us to go. And praying changes the whole face of the church that way. You see why intercession is so important.

One of my favorite writers named E.M. Bounds said, "Prayer is not preparation for the work of God, prayer is the work of God." There's a great tendency if we have a service like this that's a little different, for us to walk away and think well we didn't do things normal that day and it almost seems like well we didn't have a sermon and do singing like we normally do. Well, we didn't really do worship like we're supposed to. On the contrary, prayer is the work of God and I pray that God makes us a people that finds it far easier to sit through two hours of prayer maybe then two hours of a movie theater. That God makes us a people that would delight in three hours in front of Him, instead of three hours in front of a football game. God make us that kind of people. It's completely different way to live, it's completely different. It's the kind of living that sees the Glory of Christ realized and manifested, and I pray that God makes us that kind of people.

You didn't have even message notes today from the Word, it's because they're really simple, I'm about to give it to you right now, you don't even have to write it down, it's going to be that simple but deep. You ready? The best way to learn to pray is to pray. That'll preach, huh? I hope that God's taught us to pray some this morning, simply by coming to Him and praying. And I hope that as we scatter, we will devote ourselves to prayer.

I mentioned last week a book called *Operation World* that is a guide, a good guide to help us walk through having a global prayer life, and I believe some of those books are available out in the lobby, if they're not already all gone. We'll get some more if they are, but they're available out there if you'd like to get one of those books, if you'd like to really be more intentional in your life about praying for the needs of the world and interceding just like we've done today. A lot of the stuff that we saw on the screens today you think, well it'd be great if I had some of that information. That is a great resource for that.

I also want to encourage you, that prayer card, that has someone else's prayer request on the back of it. I want to encourage you to take advantage this week of an opportunity that you now have to pray for that person on a daily basis. You don't even know who they are, but God in His sovereignty has put that card in your celebration guide, and you have an opportunity to intercede for them this week. And so I want to invite you to pray for them. And then I want to invite us to continue to pray that prayer that I challenged us with last week.

God give us the nations, do it in such a way that only you get the glory. I want us to pray that together and believe that God wants to answer that, in and through the church of Brook Hills. In fact I'd like to ask you to stand before we're dismissed and we are going to pray that prayer together. It's pretty easy just in case you haven't been praying it all week, God give us the nations and do it in such a way that only you get the glory. Let's bow together and pray that and this will be the way we conclude our time together. Let's pray this together. God, give us the nations, and do it in such a way that only you get the glory.

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