

Fil-Am Community Church

Pastor David Bennett

Key verse: Acts 12:1-11

“Principles for Powerful Prayer”

God morning Fil-Am, as you can see there are a lot of people who are out on Vacation, so I want to say thank you for taking the time to make it to come and fellowship with us today...

As we say here at Fil-Am let's get into the Word of God, or more importantly let's get the word of God into you...

The late Dr. A. C. Dixon once said when speaking on prayer... “When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do, when we rely upon education we get what education can do; when we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do; however, when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do!

Charles Finney is a name known to everyone who has studied the mighty movements of God in country. A former lawyer turned preacher by the call of God, Charles Finney was one of the key figures during the Second Great Awakening in 19th Century America, which touched virtually every aspect of life in this country.

Finney is sometimes called "America's foremost revivalist," and there's no doubt that God had His hand on him. In the seven years in which Finney was an evangelist, there were an estimated 500,000 conversions.

His ministry in Rochester, NY from 1830-1831 has been called the greatest year of spiritual awakening in American history.

Someone did a follow-up study of those reportedly converted under Finney's preaching, and found that, years later, 80% of those who made professions of faith gave evidence of true life change.

What is more, there were immediate effects felt in the social structures of entire cities and townships. By every standard we know, that is extraordinary.

How do you account for the effectiveness that visited this man and his ministry? To what can we attribute the amazing harvest God accomplished from his preaching?

If you ask Charles Finney, he will point to one man who partnered with him in his crusades: Daniel Nash. Daniel Nash joined himself to Finney for the purpose of prayer.

When Finney was invited to speak in a city, Nash would arrive 3 or 4 weeks early, rent a room, find a small group of like-minded Christians to join him, and start a prayer meeting to plead with God for souls. Once the public meetings began, Nash usually did not attend. He and his group would stay hidden away, agonizing in prayer for the conviction of the Holy Spirit to melt the crowd.

On one occasion, Finney himself noted in his journal that when he arrived in a particular town for a revival, he was met by a lady who ran a boarding house. "Brother Finney," she asked, "do you know Mr. Nash?"

He and two other men have been at my boarding house for the last three days, but they haven't eaten a bite of food. I opened the door and peeped in at them because I could hear them groaning and I saw them down on their faces. They have been this way for three days, lying prostrate on the floor and groaning. I thought something awful must have happened to them. I was afraid to go in and I didn't know what to do. Would you please come and see about them?" And Charles Finney replied, "No, it isn't necessary. They just have a spirit of travail in prayer."

Finney and Nash traveled thousands of miles together, in prayer and proclamation of the Gospel. Then in the winter of 1831, Nash took ill. On December 20 of that year, while he was on his knees in prayer, he died at age 56. Charles Finney said I have known that man go to bed absolutely sick, for

weakness and faintness, under the pressure. And I have known him to pray as if he would do violence to Heaven, and then have seen the blessing come as plainly in answer to his prayer as if it were revealed, so that no person could doubt it any more than if God had spoken from heaven.

Today, there is a marker on a neglected grave in a cemetery near the Canadian border that reads, "Daniel Nash, Pastor, Laborer with Finney, Mighty in Prayer." He never had the limelight, the stage, or the accolades. But he shook heaven and hell because he believed in the power of praying together.

I am interested in prayer meetings like that—that do battle for souls; that overcome obstacles and move God's hand.

No one is a firmer believer in the power of prayer than the Devil; not that he practices it, but he suffers from it!

As I peer through the window of God's Word at the church in Acts, I see those kinds of prayer meetings.

As I said the last time I preached, the early church did not do a prayer meeting, it was a prayer meeting!

This morning, I want to focus on a few of the principles that are so foundational, they are pivotal. We will look at other principles next week with Pastor Rolly.

We will look at a few principles in order to remain God-focus

Let's take the first principle:

- 1. Tune in to God's Agenda***

Have you ever done a comparison between the way the apostles approached Christ in the Gospels and the way they approached Him in the book of Acts?

We learned in **IMPACT** class last week and this week in Matthew, and we will see in a few weeks in Mark, Luke, and John, their requests included calling fire down from heaven to consume those who rejected Christ, sending people away hungry, and sitting on the right and left hand of the throne when they got to heaven.

They constantly demonstrated a lack of faith, prohibited children from coming to Christ, and tried stopped someone from casting out demons.

Now and then, they would get it right, but most of the time they were out in left field when it came to Jesus and His mission. Consequently, our Lord rarely ever did what they asked.

But when you turn to the book of Acts, you find a completely different focus in their lives and in their asking.

Acts records no account that they ever failed in their faith again.

- ✓ When God looked on their prayer meetings, 3000 were converted in a single day,
- ✓ The place where they prayed was shaken, and prison doors swung open.
- ✓ Obviously, some tremendous transformation, some radical change had occurred. What made the difference?

Very simply, they went from being on their **OWN** agenda to being on **GOD's** agenda.

- ✓ They quit seeking a seat on Jesus' right and left and began praying for boldness to testify in the face of persecution.
- ✓ They quit flirting with a return to fishing and focused on shepherding the people of God.

- ✓ They stopped tripping over their circumstances and started seeking an endowment of power from on high to preach the Gospel.
- ✓ They changed from being **SELF-CENTERED** to being **GOD-CENTERED**.

In Acts 4:24-25, Peter and John were released with threats of what would happen to them if they spoke in the name of Jesus again.

They reported this to their friends who immediately, went to prayer:

24 When they heard this, they raised their voices to God unanimously and said, "Master, You are the One who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them.

25 You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David your servant: Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples plot futile things?

Why are they praying these things, quoting Scripture back to God and reflecting on the history of God's purposes?

They spend five verses telling God who He is and two verses asking Him for boldness.

Why didn't they pray, "Thank you Lord for getting our friends out of this mess? And Lord we want to be honest and tell you we're scared. Please protect us"?

Their concern was not their protection but God's purposes being secured above and beyond and through their suffering; not for their reputation to be vindicated but for His Son's; not for shelter, but for boldness.

And the result was the place where they were praying was shaken as a physical sign of the power of God falling on them and they were all empowered by the Holy Spirit for Gospel purposes.

Fil-Am let us be honest here: we spend a whole lot more time praying for God to keep Christians out of heaven than for Him to get the lost out of hell.

"God heal and help us" is prayed far more often than "save and sanctify."

The greatest tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer!

Do not make prayer a monologue, make it a conversation!

Don't get me wrong: God is our Healer and we are commanded about praying for sickness and provision. But that's just one of many, many Kingdom issues about which we are to pray. When most of our praying is about our wants, our needs, and our concerns, we will see the working of God in trace amounts. And oh how our culture needs to see His mighty power manifest through His church!

U.S. News and Internet site Beliefnet funded a poll to learn more about why, how and where people pray.

Here is a summary of the findings:

75% were Christians

64% pray more than once a day

56% say they most often pray for family members

A little over 38% say that the most important purpose of prayer is intimacy with God

41% say that their prayers are often answered

1.5 % says that their prayers are never answered

Over 73 % say their prayers were not answered; the most important reason is because they did not fit into God's plan.

5% say they pray most often in the house of the Lord

79% say they pray most at home

I call you again to join our Wednesday night prayer meetings. If you haven't been in awhile, come out again and give it a try.

Our second point today is...

2. Follow God's lead

A few months back in **IMPACT** class we discovered

- ✓ How it is that **Elijah** could believe that God would actually respond to His prayer to send fire from heaven and consume the water-soaked sacrifice?
- ✓ How could **Moses** actually think that God would split open the Red Sea when the Egyptian army was bearing down on the people of Israel?
- ✓ How could **Joshua** have the audacity to ask the sun to stand still?
- ✓ What made **Jesus** think a four-day-old corpse could live again?

They asked for the impossible because they were so **GOD-ORIENTED** that they knew what He was doing and what it meant.

- ✓ **Elijah** explained before the fire fell that God was turning Israel's heart back to Himself through the answer to prayer.
- ✓ **Moses** had spent private time before the Lord until God told Him what He was going to do.
- ✓ **Joshua** recognized that God was fighting for them, so he asked for more daylight to finish the job.

- ✓ And **Jesus** declared, prior to raising **Lazarus** from the dead that God was going to save those who were watching.

In each case, they were able to **discern** the activity, the intent, or the heart of God prior to asking. They **knew** what God wanted, so they asked Him for it.

How did they know? Notice that in each case that **discernment** and knowledge flowed from their relationship with Him.

They had paid the price **in time** with the Lord in **Scripture and prayer** so that they understood God's perspective on their life and work.

Once they understood it, they...

- ✓ Set about their Father's business
- ✓ They sensed God's power working through them as they joined Him in His work.
- ✓ They knew what God wanted done, they asked Him for it, and God answered.

We believe that Jesus could do all that He did because He was the Son of God, and rightly so.

But our Lord Himself wants us to understand this connection between discerning the heart of God and asking for what God already wants to give.

Listen to what He says, in John 5:19-20: Then Jesus replied, " *I assure you: The Son is not able to do anything on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son also does these things in the same way. For the Father loves the Son and shows Him everything He is doing, and He will show Him greater works than these so that you will be amazed.*"

Jesus discerned the heart of God and then acted.

He walked with His Heavenly Father and asked for what He already knew the Father wanted. And it was done. And He calls us to that same kind of walk.

What do we do when we are in a situation that there is no way out? We look up, to the only one that is able to step in and change the situation.

One thing to remember when Peter was in prison there were some very strategic things happening in the background.

- ✓ The Church was praying
- ✓ The Apostle was waiting

Ok let's get into our third point of the sermon today the one thing that provided the power and the way of escaping our situations...

3. The Church was Praying

The church was praying, the church should be praying, that's one of the main reasons we are here for!

- ✓ We should be praying individually,
- ✓ We should be praying in our home groups,
- ✓ We should be praying at the Wednesday night prayer meeting,
- ✓ We should be praying here on Sunday in **IMPACT** class
- ✓ We should be praying in our worship service.

Here are a few scriptures that point to our responsibility to prayer...

Matthew 7:7, *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."*

2 Corinthians 1:10-11, *“He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers.”*

Colossians 4:2-3, *“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.”*

That is what a church does, it prayer for its brothers and sisters.

Walter Knight wrote; The ancient church had a minimum of organization, but it had a maximum of power. The average church today has maximum organization but totally lacks power.

The church was praying earnestly and passionately.

Play the clip from the IPOD Acts 12:1-11

- ✓ Passionate prayer can bring light into dark situations (Acts 12:7) A light shone in the prison...and he said, arise quickly
- ✓ Passionate prayer can set you free from bondage, worries and fears, (Acts 12:7) Peter was bound with two chains between two soldiers... and his chains fell off his hands
- ✓ Passionate prayer can give you wisdom and direction for your life, (Acts 12:8) The angel said, follow me, so he went out and followed him

Prayer is not getting man's will done in heaven, but getting God's will done on earth. It is not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of God's willingness!

The last point today is...

4. The Apostle was Waiting

Let's spend a little time and make sure we understand completely the situation that Peter was in, when he was waiting.

He was guarded by four squads of highly trained Romans soldiers. Each squad had four soldiers in it for a total of 16 soldiers watching this one man.

They typically stood a 6-8 hour shift, and then switched off with a fresh group.

Notice during this time, what was Peter doing? He was **sleeping!**

The night before he was brought out, to be put up on a mock trial and executed, for Crimes against the state, he is **sleeping!**

How in the world could he sleep at a time like this?

For starters this was not the first time he had been put in prison, he had been freed before, but this time there was a death sentence over his head, so what was the difference this time?

He was able to sleep because he was able to see his **Lord and Savior** Jesus Christ, be put to a very agonizing death, and then rise to defeat death and its power.

Proverbs 3:5-6, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths strait."*

Ultimately he was calm and able to sleep because he knew that even if he died, he would one day also rise from the dead and live eternally, just as the Savior promised he would.

Peter's sleeping was a matter of waiting on the Lord. Sometimes all we can do is wait on the Lord, just trust and wait.

Psalms 37:7-8, “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.”

Isaiah 40:31, “But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Remember, Peter was sleeping so soundly, that when the angel appeared to rescue him, he had to strike him on one side to wake him up.

This was no small Love tap. It was the same Greek word used to describe how Peter struck the servant of the high priest with a sword and cut off his ear in Matthew 26:51.

We can all see what happened next, in Acts 12:7, the chains fell off of his hands, he did not take them off.

In Acts 12:10, the Iron Gate leading into the city, opened on its own accord.

How did the events occur? They did so by the supernatural hand of God. At first Peter thought it was all a dream but he still followed. It was not until he finally woke up completely and saw where he was that he realized that God has indeed shown up in a very real way.

What was his first reaction? It was to run and tell the church what God had just done for him.

He wanted to **Celebrate God’s Goodness** with them but also warn them that Herod would probably be pretty mad and might look to take it out on them.

He knew where they would be, the house of Mary, the cousin of John-Mark. Some scholars believe that this might have been the same house that Jesus and his 12 disciples celebrated his Last Supper together, as well as where the disciples gathered to pray in Acts 1 after Jesus ascended unto Heaven.

Pay attention to this, because this is where we can see God's humor. Peter stands at the door and knocks. The servant Girl, Rhoda hears him knocking and leaves the prayer meeting to see who it is.

When she gets close to the door she hears Peter's voice and gets so excited that she runs back to tell the others that Peter was there.

She didn't open the door she just left him standing there, the others didn't believe her.

They had been praying fervently and continuously for the past few days that God would deliver Peter from Herod and prison, and when he showed up they didn't believe it was him.

How many times do we offer up prayers for someone to be healed, a job interview to go well, or even someone to be saved?

Yet we do it half heartedly, and unexpectedly thinking that God would never answer the prayer anyway.

Our prayers **Must Mean Something** to us if they are to **Mean Anything** to God!

Peter was in prison when the Church was praying for him...

If you look at it, we have all been in some sort of prison...

- ✓ Fear
- ✓ Doubt
- ✓ Disbelief
- ✓ Greed
- ✓ Lust
- ✓ Anger
- ✓ Jealously
- ✓ Power
- ✓ Etc.

All of these and so many more have imprisoned us at times.

We need to stop all the commotion around us, all the chaotic mess and try and get **God-Focused!**

You must Tune into **God's Agenda**

You must **Follow God's Lead**

You must wait while the Church is **Praying**

You must be **Waiting on the Lord!**