

Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ

May 19, 2019

To Adult Teachers:

May 12, we will study Acts 1:4-14 and Acts 2:1-4. Discussion questions follow.

Warm Up Questions

When have you participated in a particularly meaningful time of prayer with a group of other Christians? What made that time so special? What positive results did you see as a result?

Scripture Reflection (Read Acts 1:4-14)

1. For what did Jesus instruct his disciples to wait? What did Jesus indicate the result would be after they had received this waited-for promise? What would have happened if they had not waited, but gone to work immediately to produce the results of which Jesus spoke?
2. When Jesus ascended into the cloud, the disciples were looking “intently” at him. What do you think they were trying to see? Who were the two men who spoke to them? How do the words of these men refocus the disciples’ attention?
3. After the ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem and obeyed Jesus’ instruction to “wait.” Where did they wait? What occupied their time while they waited? Why was this important?
4. Who joined in prayer with the assembled with the apostles? Read Mark 3:20-21, 31-34 and John 7:5. What has obviously changed at this point in the way his mother and brothers viewed Jesus? How do you think this change came about?
5. Read Acts 2:1-4. How was it obvious that they were receiving that for which Jesus had instructed them to wait? What role do you think their prayers played in bringing about what they received?
6. What are some things for which we “wait” as Christians? As a congregation? What role should prayer have as we wait for God’s promises?
7. In what ways could we be more intentional about “waiting” in prayer?

Sermon: *Constantly in Prayer*

Acts 1:1-14

1. Why are you standing here looking up into the sky? Why wouldn’t we be? We were just standing here and suddenly our friend just lifted off! Message: he will come back. Implication, there’s work to be done between now and then—on earth. You have a mission. And we have a mission. You are not an accident on the earth. You have a mission to fulfill. We get up in the morning and our minds floods with all the things we have to do that day. Maybe say a prayer to ask God to help us get it all done. Mind shift: get up in the morning and say, “God has something for me to do today and I can’t wait to find out what it is.” Be my witnesses. “In *that* workplace? With *those* people? Right *now*? Yes!
2. Then they do a most unexpected thing. They go off by themselves and pray. Our mixed feelings toward prayer. I like the idea of prayer. But I struggle with it.
 - a. We think prayer and action are opposites. If you know what to do, do it. If you don’t know what to do, pray. People tell us their problems. If we know what to do, we give advice. If not, we say, “I’ll be praying for you.” Given any situation, our tendency is to dive right in, take the bull by the horns. Only if it’s beyond our capabilities do we turn to prayer.

- b. But they have a different idea about prayer. They were being obedient. Jesus' instruction: wait (1:4). Not passive, but active waiting. Prayer is real kingdom work. Result: Pentecost, 2.1 billion people who claim Jesus as their Lord.
 - c. Our tendency: see a need, start a program, a ministry, often copying another church's plan. Sometimes that works; often not. We need to be asking God what he's doing, join him. Wait until He empowers us.
3. Waiting in prayer is a sign of a healthy church! Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*: "Prayer and the health of the church go hand in hand. When the church is engaged in meaningful prayer, it becomes both the cause and the result of greater church health."
4. What is accomplished by waiting in prayer?
- a. Reminds us that we're not in charge.
 - b. Moves us from achieving to receiving. The kingdom is not achieved through our striving, but received by God's grace.
 - c. Empowers us for God's mission. Reminds us that we can do nothing of value apart from God's power. "Be my witnesses," but they are uneducated men.
 - d. Fills us with the Spirit of Jesus. Reminds us that knowing *about* Jesus is not enough; being filled with his Spirit is essential.
- Pete Greig, leader of a group that committed to praying 24/7: "One thing I've learned is that prayer is not a big switch in the sky that makes revival happen. It's not a formula at all. It's a relationship. After a few weeks of nonstop prayer in that first 24-7 prayer room, I think we kind of thought, 'Man, we've never prayed this hard before in our lives. Any minute now, the angel Gabriel is going to come through the clouds singing the Hallelujah Chorus and everybody is going to get saved.' Don't get me wrong; we've seen plenty of remarkable answers to prayer, but it's just not like a Coke machine. You don't put in your prayer and get out a miracle. It's more agrarian. It's more organic. You sow something and you harvest it later, and it's often quite different from what you sowed."
5. So, what happens when we devote ourselves to prayer?
- a. Same thing that happened when Jesus prayed. John 5:19-20a Jesus was aligned with God and his will. In prayer, we come to understand what God is doing, discover how we can join him in it.
 - b. We pray for a lot of things other than this. For a while, stop praying for that job, for that bill to get paid, for that sick relative, for that wayward child. Stop praying for your circumstances to change; pray for God to change you in your circumstances. Eleventh Step of AA: We sought through prayer and meditation to increase our conscious contact with God, praying only for a knowledge of his will and the power to carry it out.
 - c. Ever wonder what God's will is for you? Prayer is how we receive that guidance. But guidance is worth what we pay for it.
 - (1) Friends give advice for free. Some good, some bad, your choice whether to take it or not.
 - (2) Counselors, financial advisors, consultants charge high prices for their advice. Still, you choose whether or not to take it.
 - (3) God's fee for guidance is the highest of all. He requires complete abandonment. "God, I trust, you, period. Give me or withhold from me whatever you will."
6. Prayer is a community enterprise. As I've been talking about prayer, you've been applying it individually, haven't you? How do I know? You are Americans. But the prayer of the early Christians was communal prayer: *homothumadon*. In one accord, of one mind, together. Same passion. How do we arrive at unity of purpose? Visitation program, social fellowship events, shaking hands as part of service? Wrestling in prayer together.

Apply this message to the search process. So why is it taking so long to get a new minister? Just hire someone already! We're taking a different tack. Spending time focused in prayer. Prayer is hard work. It is effective work. Need for waiting in prayer is intense just now.