

June 30, 2002 by Steve Brandon



The Teaching of Jesus Christ - Why Do You Do What You Do? (Part 2)

Matthew 6:5-8

1. Do you pray for others to see? (verse 5)
2. Do you pray for God alone to see? (verse 6)
3. Do you pray as if God needs many words? (verse 7)
4. Do you pray as if God knows your need? (verse 8)

Open your Bibles to Matthew 6. We saw in our study of the Sermon on the Mount last week that there are certain dangers that await our spiritual activities. We might be prone to think that there is nothing particularly dangerous about giving to help the needy. We might have a tendency to believe that any types of praying is better than no praying. The same holds true with fasting.

Yet, with these three activities, there is great danger. Jesus begins chapter 6 with this warning. He says in verse 1, "**Beware** of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Our danger in these religious activities is involved with our motives before God of why we do these activities. We can give of our resources to others in a way that brings glory and honor to God. Or, we can bring glory and honor to ourselves. We can pray in such a way that God, alone, is glorified. Or we can pray so as to bring upon ourselves the praise of men. We can fast as an act of worship to God. Or we can fast for the praise and approval of men. It comes down to the question that I asked last week, which I would like to ask again this week: "Why do you do what you do?"

Your motivation is everything with respect to your religious activities. The Pharisees were the most externally religious people who have ever walked the planet! They made sure that they were careful to keep all of the commandments of God and lived according to the strictest of standards. But Jesus rebuked them. It was not for their religious activity that Jesus rebuked them, but for the manner in which they carried about their religious activity. The Pharisees were religious, not for God's sake, but for their own. They paraded their piety before others, that they might be thought of as being righteous. This is why they did what they did.

This morning, again, I will ask you, "Why do you do what you do?" We shall spend our time this morning in four verses of this great sermon, verses 5, 6, 7, and 8. These words of Jesus focus our attention on our practice of prayer.

Matthew 6:5-8

And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.

In verse 5, Jesus says, "and when you pray." Praying is perhaps the most basic of all Christian activity.

Indeed, **prayer is the first act of conversion**. When God opens the eyes of a sinner to see his own wickedness and wretchedness and helplessness before God, the only response from the heart is a cry to God for mercy. (Many of you have cried to God in this way). This cry is not often very eloquent. Most people who cry for help are particularly careful or thoughtful concerning their words. They simply cry, "Help!" Such is the cry of an awakened sinner. He will cry, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." This is what the publican cried, who found justification before God (Luke 18:13).

Prayer is also the constant act of the Christian. A quick survey of the Scripture will demonstrate this quite easily. Jesus said that we ought to pray "at all times" (Luke 18:1). We are called to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). We are called to be "devoted to prayer" (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2). The early church was "continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). So much is prayer the most basic of Christian activity, that if you show me a Christian who doesn't pray, I will show you a living person who doesn't breathe.

Now, it isn't that the Christian is constantly on his knees, constantly verbalizing prayers to God. Rather, the follower of Jesus Christ knows God and will be offering up continual prayers of praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. The Christian will view the wonders of creation, and will praise God. The Christian loves to meditate on the redemption from sin he has found. It stirs a thankfulness in our hearts. We often sing, "How marvelous, how wise, how great, how infinite to contemplate Jehovah's saving plan!" The Psalmist expresses it appropriately when he wrote, "You, O LORD, have made me glad by what You have done. I will sing for joy at the works of Your hands" (Ps. 92:4). This was Paul's natural response in Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" He spoke this after meditating on our salvation for 11 chapters of his epistle.

The Christian will also offer up prayers for help, guidance, and direction. Perhaps you have experienced sharing the truths of the gospel with someone. The whole time, you are pleading for God to reveal Himself to them, that they might see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. Perhaps you have suddenly found yourself in a compromising situation, the response of the Christian is often a cry to God for guidance. Nehemiah modeled this when he was asked a question by the king. Before he responded, the Scripture says that Nehemiah "prayed to the God of heaven" (Neh. 2:4), and then responded to the king's question.

This is how a Christian prays constantly. Even before responding in conversation, prayers are offered up to God. The wonders of God's working give reason to praise Him. Prayer is the constant act of the Christian. As I said before, you can no more be a Christian and not pray than you can live and not breathe.

So, this morning, I do assume that you pray. My message this morning is directed to those of you who do pray. When Jesus preached this sermon, it was His assumption as well, "when you pray" (verse 5). The application of the passage doesn't make sense if you don't pray. In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is addressing those who are praying wrongly. He isn't directing His attention upon those who don't pray.

Now, in my assumption, I realize that I may be excluding some of you, who don't pray. If you are one of those people this morning, realize there is one reason why you don't pray: You don't know God. Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). If you don't know God, it is because you haven't come yet to a place to see your sin and your tremendous need for forgiveness. You children, especially, perhaps you don't think that you are a very bad person. As one child said to me recently, "I'm not selfish." If this is how you view yourself, you haven't yet understood the need for Jesus to die on the cross.

So, this morning, I am addressing those who pray. As my Sermon title indicates, I will ask you the question Jesus asks each of us this morning, "Why do you do what you do?" In this instance, "Why do you pray?" I want to ask you four questions this morning, which will help you understand why you pray. See, I can't see your motives for your prayers. Only you can. So, the best way to determine your motives is to ask you some questions which hopefully will reveal your genuine motives before God. I am trusting the Spirit of God to convict your hearts of any wrong practices you have with prayer.

1. Do you pray for others to see? (verse 5)

Jesus said, "when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full" (verse 5). Last week, we saw that you might think of a hypocrite as an actor. Jesus says, "when you pray, you are not to be as the actors," who play the part on the stage at the show on Friday and Saturday, but are entirely different in real life.

Obviously, Jesus is speaking here about the Pharisees, who loved to parade their piety before others for all to see. We are told elsewhere in the Bible that these Pharisees "do all of their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi" (Matt. 23:5-8). They took the command of God to bind His words as a sign on your hand and on your forehead (Deut. 6:8), and literally did this by tying little boxes to themselves. These boxes were called phylacteries and contained portions of Scripture in them. They made their phylacteries larger, to show off their piety. They also took the command of God to wear tassels on their garments (Num. 15:38), which were to be a reminder of the commandments of the LORD. In order to put their righteousness on display, they lengthened their tassels. They loved to be seen by others as religiously, righteous people.

In verse 5, Jesus said that these Pharisees would seek places in the synagogue and out of the synagogue to act out their religiosity. When the Rabbi was planning the service, they wanted to be those who lead the congregation in prayer. They were first to volunteer their scripture reading and praying abilities. They would also venture out along the streets and stand and pray. We don't know exactly how they did this, but we might venture a guess that they are similar to the Jews of today. You can travel to Israel today, and you will find Jews in public places praying (in the airport, on a plane, outside Jerusalem, near the Western Wall of Jerusalem). As they pray, they hold their prayer books in their hands. They mumble the words written there. They sway back and forth. (Some really get into it and sway and bob their head up and down, but the more reserved folks will sway only a little).

They loved doing this! Yet, such praying is utterly useless. You may say a prayer that is perfectly doctrinally correct in every way. You may say a prayer that rivals the eloquence of Charles Spurgeon, perhaps the most eloquent man ever to walk the planet. You may say a prayer that goes on for several minutes. You may say such a prayer and God may not hear such a prayer. It is one thing to say a prayer. It is another thing for God to hear your prayer. Not because God is deaf, but because of your motives in your prayers. If you are seeking to pray for others to see you pray, your prayer is a sinful and self-centered prayer. God will not hear your prayer.

There are many verses in the Bible like Psalm 66:18, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." In Isaiah, God told Israel, "I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. ... when you spread out your hands in prayer [like our charismatic brothers], I will hide My eyes from you. Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood" (Is. 1:13, 15). God will turn a deaf ear to those who pray sinfully and selfishly to be seen by men.

There is a picture that was once exhibited in London. As you looked at it from a distance, you seemed to see a monk engaged in prayer, his hands clasped, his head bowed. As you can nearer, however, and examined the painting more closely, you saw that in reality he was squeezing a lemon into a punch bowl! From a distance, the act might look like a righteous act. Yet, when examined further, we find that it wasn't at all what it appeared to be. What a picture that is of many prayers that are offered to God today. While they may indeed look and sound like righteous prayers, in fact, they are no more a religious act than when one prepares his lemonade to drink.

This danger is especially appropriate for all who pray publicly. And here, I address you men in particular, whom I have asked to pray publicly

in our service. There is a danger in your praying. When we pray in the presence of others, we need to pray in such a way that others might hear, that they might join in our prayers. Yet, our prayers need to be focussed upon God, and not upon those listening. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones gives great advice, "Public prayer should be such that the people who are praying silently and the one who is uttering the words should be no longer conscious of each other, but should be carried on the wings of prayer into the very presence of God" (Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 2, page 27).

If you pray for others to see you pray, God will turn a deaf ear. If you do, you have already received all of the reward that you will ever get. Let's move on to our second question, ...

2. Do you pray for God alone to see? (verse 6)

Verse 6, "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

The picture Jesus gives is simple enough. He says, "when you pray ..." (again, affirming that we will pray), "... go into your inner room..." (a place where nobody else is around: your bedroom, your basement storage room, your car, or your bedroom), "... shut your door ..." (so that nobody will see you or hear you), "... and pray to your Father."

I want you to think with me now of a private place that you have, where you can get away from everybody. Perhaps this is at home. Perhaps this is at work. Perhaps this is driving to work. Some of you here have large families, which may make it difficult. Mothers, especially, this might be difficult, with children demanding things of you at every turn. If this is the case, you might want to follow the example of Susanna Wesley, who had 19 children. She used to put a cloth over her head to pray. When the cloth was on her head, she was not to be disturbed. Perhaps you might want to begin instigating a time each morning, when you send your children to their rooms, for their quiet times. You will teach them discipline, and you will be undisturbed for a half an hour.

Anyway, Think now of a private place you have. Jesus instructs us to pray there. Do you use your private place as a place of prayer? Or are you prayerless? I ask you because you are the only one who knows whether or not your pray in such a place. Jesus tells us to make use of our inner chamber for the purpose of prayer.

This was the habit of Jesus. "In the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there" (Mark 1:35). "After bidding [His disciples] farewell, He departed to the mountains to pray" (Mark 6:46). Luke tells us that "He would often slip away to the wilderness and pray" (Luke 5:16). In the garden before His death, He separated Himself from His disciples to be alone (Matt. 26:39). Jesus found His place of prayer and prayed. Jesus made for Himself, places where He could pray.

At this point, there are those who begin to think that Jesus is condemning public prayer. He is not. In verse 5, Jesus expresses danger in the motives of praying publicly. In verse 6, Jesus tells us to go and pray in private. He doesn't condemn public prayer. Condemning public prayer would go against the example of Jesus. Jesus prayed in the presence of His disciples in John 17, shortly before His death. Jesus prayed with His disciples after they returned from their evangelistic efforts (Luke 10:21-22). Jesus prayed to God in the presence of many, at the raising of Lazarus (John 11:41-42).

Condemning public prayer would go against the example of the early church. Those in the early church were "continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). The early church held prayer meetings after prayer meeting, particularly in difficult times (Acts 4:23ff; Acts 12:5ff). Paul even sought out the public place of prayer in Philippi (Acts 16:16).

Condemning public prayer would go against Jesus' own teaching. Look at verses 9-13. Notice how everything is "our" and "us." We are told to pray, "**Our** Father, ... Give **us** this day **our** daily bread. ... Forgive **us our** debts, as **we** have also forgiven **our** debtors" (verse 12). Jesus assumes that the prayer He taught us to pray will be prayed in a group, where the "our" makes sense. Jesus isn't condemning public prayer. Rather, he is condemning showmanship in public prayer.

I read of a supplicational show-off, who stood up in a prayer meeting and began to pray one of those long theological prayers, "O God who sitteth upon the circle of the earth for whom the inhabitants are like grasshoppers." He went on and on until finally, someone sitting behind him tapped him on the shoulder and whispered: "Just call him Father, and ask him for something." This is what Jesus is condemning: supplicational show-offs, professional petitioners, and theatrical thanksgivers.

Last week I gave you a gauge with which to guide your actions. I will repeat it, because I think that it is the best guide that we can have. If you do it in private, do it in public. If you do it in public, do it in private. In other words, be real in your praying. You don't need to always hide your prayers. Don't be a show-off.

3. Do you pray as if God needs many words? (verse 7)

Verse 7, "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words."

We don't know what or how the Gentiles exactly prayed to their so-called gods. Perhaps they are like the native Indians in our country, who would hold all-night rain dances, seeking rain from their gods. In 1 Kings 18:25-40, we get a glimpse of how the Gentiles often pray. In this account Elijah was engaged in a contest with the prophets of Baal. Elijah told these prophets to choose an ox for themselves and to prepare it as a sacrifice, only don't put fire under it. Rather, they were to call on the name of Baal to light a fire on the altar. So the prophets of Baal did so and called upon the name of Baal in every imaginable way. They called on the name of Baal. They leaped about the altar. They cried with loud voices. They cut themselves with swords and lances. They did everything that they could to appease their gods with their many words. Jesus said that such people are not heard.

I fear that many Christians today fall into the same error. Many today think that there is a prayer ozone layer that we need to penetrate, so that God will finally hear us. The longer the prayers and the more others are praying, the better the chance that our prayers will finally break through, so that God will hear and answer our prayer.

I remember reading a story by Dr. Seuss called, "Horton Hears a Who!" In this story, there is a world of creatures who exist on a piece of dust. One day, Horton, who is an elephant with very large ears and extremely good hearing, comes upon this speck of dust and actually hears sound coming from it. He begins to speak with those in this world. In the story everybody thinks that Horton is crazy, because he is speaking to this tiny speck of dust. Try as they might, nobody else could hear any sound coming from this dust. So, in an effort to help Horton, they made great plans to destroy the speck of dust. Those who lived in this tiny world were needing to prove their existence to the bigger world around them. So, they made lots and lots of noise, trying to allow Horton's friends to hear them and believe that they existed. The problem was that they had a sort of ozone layer keeping the sound in, until finally a little boy helps push the sound through with his, "Yap" at the top of his lungs. Finally, their noise broke through, and those in Horton's world believed that such a world existed on this tiny speck of dust.

Many people think that this is a picture of God. If only we pray loud enough and long enough, and with enough fervency, God will hear and will answer our prayer. I remember reading some Christian fiction, which pictured prayer as a sort of umbrella, which merits spiritual power and defense. Today, we hear that so-and-so is sick, so we think we need to have as many as possible pray for recovery, because we think that God hears many prayers. Or, we hear of someone in danger, so we seek to get all the Christians we know to pray, because we think that God will hear our many prayers.

Please don't get me wrong. I am all for praying for the health of the sick. I am all for praying for those in danger. As a church, we have, and will continue to do so. However, we ought not to think that through the multiplying of prayers, God will hear better. Rather, we ought to pray, and elicit many others to pray for these situations, because of our love for God and His mercy and justice to be manifest in our world. Additionally, such multiplying of prayers is simply an indication of the greatness of our need. The greater the need, the greater our dependence upon God. Prayer serves to remind us of our dependence.

The Jews of Jesus' day, also had an issue with long, multiplied, repetitious prayers. Jesus said that the Jews of his day "for a pretense make long prayers" (Matt. 23:14). The Jews had a saying that "everyone that multiplies prayer is heard" (quoted by John Gill in his commentary).

Jesus' point is simply that long, repetition in prayer is useless. I don't know about you, but I have certainly heard this type of praying. I've been involved in prayer meetings where someone is praying and demanding of God and being worked up and saying the same things again and again and again. There is someone else over here listening to is saying, "Yes, Jesus. Yes, Jesus. Yes, Jesus. Yes, Jesus. Yes, Jesus." That's nothing more than a mantra -- meaningless repetition. And I would contend -- using the name of the Lord in vain. The KJV here says, "when ye pray, use not vain repetitions." This type of praying is within the church. Perhaps you have experienced it.

I have heard many Roman Catholics tell me that after confession of sin to a priest, they have been told to say 15 "Hail Mary's" and 10 "Our Father's" as penance, to demonstrate your sorrow before the Lord. This is done in the belief that, hopefully, God will see your sorrow and your demonstration of sorrow and He will forgive you. I find it astonishing that Jesus' prohibition against such type of praying comes right within the context of the prayers that these people pray (in verses 9-13 are found the words to the "Our Father," which the Roman Catholics are wont to repeat again and again and again). They pray as if saying these prayers again and again and again have merit before God! Jesus said that they don't. Long repetition in prayer is useless. God simply ignores such praying.

But that isn't to say that long periods of time spent in prayer are always wrong. Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights fasting, as He began His earthly ministry (Matt. 4:1-11). I am sure that much of this time was spent in prayer. On one occasion, "He spent the whole night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12). So often did he slip away and pray (Luke 5:16), that His disciples asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Jesus even told parables of the widow, who asks and asks and asks the judge, who finally gives into her request for justice (Luke 18:1-8). (Though, we ought to notice that we need to learn primarily from the judge according to verse 6. If a wicked and self-serving judge will give in, what about our loving, merciful Father?)

Furthermore, the most eminently holy men of days gone by have always been those who spent long, extended periods of time in prayer. You can read in David Brainerd's biography statements like this ...

Saturday, December 15. Spent much time in prayer in the woods and seemed raised above the things of this world...

Monday, March 14 ...in the morning was almost continually engaged in ejaculatory prayer...

Thursday, August 4. Was enabled to pray much, through the whole day...

Thursday, November 3. Spent this day in secret fasting, and prayer, from morning till night...

I have heard that Luther was prone to say, "I am so busy today that I must spend the first three hours in prayer." Peter Deyneka, the founder of Slavic Gospel Mission studied for the ministry at St. Paul Bible Institute. Every Friday night, they had a night of prayer. He said that in the three years that he was there, he missed about 6 of these nights.

It is the long, repeated, over-and-over-and-over prayers that Jesus is denouncing here. You don't need many words to God to show your earnestness. You need many, many prayers to finally get through to God. You don't need to remind God, as if God was going to grant you your request, until He forgot or was distracted by the prayer request of another. Your repeated prayers don't remind God. Rather, in verse 8 Jesus says, "Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him," which leads us to our last question, ...

4. Do you pray as if God knows your need? (verse 8)

Do you think that God knows the needs of those families in our midst who are dealing with the effects of cancer? Do you think that God knew of the situation of the Burnhams in the Philippines? Indeed He did! In fact, God knows of these and similar situations far more than we will ever know. Furthermore, God knows the exact needs that each family has and can meet these needs exactly according to His own pleasure.

I am comforted to know that God even knows the best way for us to pray for each of these difficult situations. Listen to Paul's words, "We do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). In other words, the Spirit intercedes for us, because we don't even know the best way to pray for these things.

The question is often asked, "If God already knows our need, why then, should we pray?" Certainly it isn't because God needs our prayers in any way. Rather, prayer is our acknowledgement to God of our great need for Him to help! This ought to drive us to prayer. If ever your theology of the Sovereignty of God ever leads you to no prayer, you have not understood your great need for God. Sure, you may understand correctly how God is in absolute control of everything, from a molecule on mars to your next breath. But, lack of prayer fails comes because you fail to understand your need for God in your circumstance or in the circumstance of others.

Let me close by saying a few things about prayer in the life of Rock Valley Bible Church. My desire (perhaps stronger than any of you know) for Rock Valley Bible Church is that we would be a praying church. There are several reasons for this.

1) Prayer is an indicator of our faith.

Where there is much faith, there is much prayer. Where there is little faith, there is little prayer. As a pastor, my goal is to see you all come to trust God in greater and greater ways.

Each week, as I stand here and preach, I try to convince you of the greatness of your sin. I try to remind you of your great need for a Savior from your sin. I continually set before you the Sovereignty of God, who has power over all things, and the loveliness of God, who can be trusted with everything. Each of these things ought to cause us to continually cry to Him, who is able to give mercy and grace in our hour of great need. "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Last week I mentioned how giving is an indicator of your faith. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). It shows where your treasure lies (upon the earth, or in heaven with God). Likewise with prayer as well. A lack of prayer is nothing more and nothing less than a lack of faith. Just as I want you to give willingly to the church, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7), so my desire for you is to pray, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a thankful pray-er.

In this way then, prayer is a sort of thermometer in the church. The fervency and the frequency of your prayers, push the mercury in the thermometer higher and higher. Though Spurgeon himself admitted, "You cannot measure fire by the bushel" (quoted by Lewis Drummond, Spurgeon, Prince of Preachers, p. 29), it still is some sort of an indicator. The cold church is the church that never prays. The church on fire for the Lord is the church that loves to pray.

2) Prayer is the power of the church

In one sense, prayer is a thermometer. In a greater sense, it is a thermometer, because it is a thermostat. You know the difference don't you? Both of them will indicate what temperature the room is. The thermometer measures the temperature in the room. The thermostat causes the temperature to go up or down. The difference is that the thermometer measures what is already there, but the thermostat changes what is there. The praying church will be the church that God will delight to bless, because the praying church is the church where God will get the glory for what He does in the church. The church won't rob God of the glory due His name, by thinking that they did something marvelous here.

I could go right down church history and demonstrate to you how God awesomely blessed those who committed themselves to prayer. **Robert Murray M'Cheyne** had more than thirty prayer meetings in his church. God blessed the church in Dundee greatly as a result of it (quoted by David Larsen in *The Anatomy of Preaching*, p. 54). When **Hudson Taylor** was first believed in Jesus, he went to the prayer-meeting on Wednesday night, the place was so crowded that he had difficulty finding a place to sit (*The Growth of a Soul*, p. 76). You know of the wonderful things that the Lord did through Hudson Taylor. At the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, some 3,000 people would show up every Monday evening for a prayer meeting. We know what God did through the ministry of **Charles Spurgeon** (Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon, Prince of Preachers*, p. 272). When **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones** began ministering in the small village of Aberavon, the prayer meeting was scarcely attended. Yet, within a few years, many came, and there was much liberty in their prayers. Lloyd-Jones' biographer records that on one Monday night May of 1931, the prayer-meeting began as usual at 7:15 pm and was stopped by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones at 10pm after 44 had taken part in prayer. You can read about the conversions that took place in that little community, and you would be astonished.

I could give you more and more examples in history. The book of Acts is a great testimony of the Spirit of God working through the prayers of His people. I believe that prayer is the power of the church. I don't believe in the power of prayer. I

believe in the power of the God to whom we pray.

Let's think about Rock Valley Bible Church. Are we a praying church? Are you a praying people? What if we would take a survey of all of you? We handed out slips of paper that asked questions like ...

1. How many times per week do you read the Bible?
2. How much time do you spend in reading your Bible?
3. Do you set aside a daily time for prayer?
4. How much time do you spend daily in prayer?
5. Does you practice family worship?
6. If so, how often do you do family worship?

When the results were tabulated, what would they say? Would it be an encouraging thing or discouraging? I believe that the results would be a thermometer reading on where the church is with respect to our devotional life. It would show us what we really believe.

When a nightclub opened on Main Street, the only church in that small town organized an all-night prayer meeting. The members asked God to burn down the club. Within a few minutes, lightning struck the club, and it burned to the ground. The owner sued the church, which denied responsibility. After hearing both sides, the judge said, "It seems that wherever the guilt may lie, the nightclub owner believes in prayer, while the church doesn't." What an indictment upon the church!

Here is my heart. My heart is for Rock Valley Bible Church to be a praying church. I would encourage you all to pray individually, every day. I would encourage you all to gather as families for family worship (simple singing, Bible reading, and prayer), every day. I would encourage you all to gather as a church for prayer, every week. As a church, we gather once a week for corporate prayer, at 8:45am. My heart is that everybody who regularly comes to Rock Valley Bible Church would be there.

We have great need. I see our great need. It faces me every day. Perhaps because I am engrossed in it. Yet, at times, I am overwhelmed. I say with Paul, "Who is sufficient for these things?" because I know that I am not. I thank the Lord that He is the one who will always lead us in triumph. Do you see the need? If not, pray that God show you the need we have of Him. Do you have a desire to pray? If not, pray for the desire to pray. May God delight to give Rock Valley Bible Church a greater understanding of our need for Him and a resultant prayer, which would affect our personal prayer lives. May this also bleed over into the prayer life of our family and for our corporate prayer life as well.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 30, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.