

January 3, 2016 by Steve Brandon



# Circles of Prayer

## Various

1. Pray Alone
2. Pray With Your Spouse
3. Pray With Your Family
4. Pray With Your Church

My message this morning comes from a burden. It comes from a burden for prayer. It comes from a burden for our prayer meeting.

Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher, once describes prayer meetings as “spare” meetings, because prayer meetings were so poorly attended in London during his days as pastor. <sup>[1]</sup> His experience at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, however, was quite different than this. His prayer meetings were full. We are talking a thousand coming each Monday evening to pray.

On one occasion, he addressed the crowds with these words:

What a company we have here tonight! It fills my heart with gladness and my eyes with tears of joy to see so many hundreds of persons gathered together at what is sometimes wickedly described as “only a prayer meeting.”

It is good for us to draw nigh unto God in prayer, and specially good to make up a great congregation for such a purpose. We have attended little prayer meetings of four or five, and we have been glad to be there, for we had the promise of our Lord's presence; but our minds are grieved to see so little attention given to united prayer by many of our churches. We have longed to see great numbers of God's people coming up to pray, and we now enjoy this sight. Let us praise God that it is so.

How could we expect a blessing if we were too idle to ask for it? How could we look for a Pentecost if we never met with one accord, in one place, to wait upon the Lord? Brethren, we shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general till the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians. <sup>[2]</sup>

And this, church family, is what I hope comes about as a result of my message this morning. That “the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians” at Rock Valley Bible Church.

Our prayer meeting at Rock Valley Bible Church can rightly be called a “spare meeting.” We have done everything possible to make this time as convenient as possible. Many churches have their prayer meetings mid-week, which would require an extra trip to the church building. We meet on Sunday mornings at 9am in the family room. This requires you simply to come to church an hour earlier.

But we have had so few attend this meeting, that this has been a matter of discussion among the elders for quite some time as to what we should do? If so few are interested in gathering to pray together as a church body, then what are we doing? Why are we putting our efforts into something that is gathering so little interest? Should we have a Sunday school?

And then I ask you, “What is our need? Do we really need more Bible teaching at Rock Valley Bible Church?” Or, do we need more heart for God? Just ask yourselves this question: In your life, do you need more head knowledge of the truth? Or, do we need more heart passion for God?

But with so little interest expressed in the prayer meeting, we, as elders, have considered just stopping our prayer meeting. About two months ago (10/26/2015), I emailed Phil and Darryn and said that I was willing to suspend our prayer meeting.

Darryn wrote back, “I also am disappointed by the lack of attendance [at prayer meeting]. I begrudgingly agree to suspend it. I just hope it isn't the mark of the beginning of the end of RVBC.” Darryn's words rang in my ears. “I just hope it isn't the mark of the beginning of the end of RVBC.”

There are times when you can trace the downfall of an organization to a single event. For a football team, it might be the injury of a star player, who plays such a crucial role to the team that his absence means that the team could no longer compete. For a church, it might be the change in pastor. A new guy comes in and fails to love and lead the church. And the attendance drops off and soon the building is sold. For a business, it might be some new product that fails to perform at expected. And with all of the company's resources going into the new product, they simply couldn't recover. For a marriage, it might be the class reunion, where old high-school sweethearts unite once again. And the old flames fire up again and soon an inappropriate relationship leads to divorce.

And this is what Darryn's comment is getting at. When the history of Rock Valley Bible Church is told, is suspending our weekly prayer meeting the single event that signaled the downfall of this precious church?

Now, that's not to say that churches can't do well without a prayer meeting. No. They can. Indeed, they do.

K. P. Yohannan was born and raised in India. He founded Gospel for Asia, a prominent missions agency with more than 10,000 national missionaries. He writes, ...

I will never forget one of my first prayer meetings in America. I had been in the United States for only a few weeks, and I was eager to meet the spiritual giants and leaders. Even before leaving India, I had heard of one man in particular. He was famous for his uncompromising defense of the Scriptures and sound doctrine.

So on that first Sunday, I hurried to visit his church – one of the most famous in the city. More than 3,000 attended the morning services to hear the talented choirs and outstanding preaching of the Word.

My ears perked right up when the pastor of the church announced a special emphasis at the upcoming mid-week prayer meeting. There were some things "heavy on his heart," he said. He announced the name of a certain chapel, and I determined to attend.

...

On the appointed night I arrived early, fearful that I would not get a good seat – or even a seat at all! Right away I noticed that there was room for only about 500 worshippers, but there was no singing or clapping. The hall was completely empty. I walked all the way to the front and took a seat to wait.

By 7:15 I was getting really worried. "I must have gotten the wrong hall," I reasoned. I even went outside to check the name above the door to make certain I was in the right place.

Finally, at 7:30 several others came into the huge hall. There was no leader, songs, or worship. People sat and talked about sports and weather.

After about forty-five minutes an elderly man came in to lead the prayer meeting. The pastor was not even there. I counted seven people. The elderly man read a Scripture, made some devotional observations and led a brief prayer.

As the others got up to leave, I sat stunned. Was this it? Were they not going to stay and wait upon God? Where was the worship? The tears? The cries for guidance and direction? Where was the list of the sick, and the poor, and those in need? What about that burden the pastor said was heavy on his heart? Were we not going to intercede for a miracle?

And what about missions? This church supported missions on every continent. Were they not going to pass around the missionary prayer letters and pray together for those facing attacks from Satan on the front lines? [\[3\]](#)

My hope and my vision for Rock Valley Bible Church involves a prayer meeting like K. P. Yohannan experienced in India. Like Charles Spurgeon experienced in London. Where many are interested in coming. Where many are interested in praying.

I would envision that our church would work like this: Sunday mornings don't begin at 10am. They really begin at 9am, with the prayer meeting. When we pray, with much participation from all who come, we have so many come, that we can't fit into the family room. But, we have to meet here in the auditorium. Then, Sunday morning continues at 10am, with a formal worship service where we praise God with one voice and hear his word. Then, it continues at 11:30am, with a time of fellowship for all, where we connect with each other and slowly dissipate into our homes.

In other words, Sunday morning is full. Prayer, Worship, Fellowship. And beyond that, any midweek meetings we have would only fill various needs. With the youth, with men, with women.

I hope that we don't overburden people, that they feel so busy with the church that their personal efforts to reach out to those who don't know Christ would be hindered. And that happens sometimes. People are so busy with the church and its activities that they have no time to bring the gospel to a world that is hurting. They miss the purpose of the church, to go and make disciples of the nations.

And the prayer meeting fits into this vision in such a way that it is clear that God has done the work to build the church. We have prayed for God's blessing upon our lives. And he has blessed us. We have prayed for God to bring people to himself. And God has opened eyes to see the gospel and add them to our number.

And people look on at Rock Valley Bible Church and say, "How does that church work? Why are they so loving toward others? Why are they so passionate toward God? Why are they so effective in talking to those around them about Jesus? Why have so many people come to faith in Christ?" And the answer comes, "Because they have committed themselves to prayer. And God has been faithful to hear them pray. And God has been gracious to bless them."

And I fear that without a prominent prayer meeting, the answer might easily be centered upon us -- our gifts, our abilities, our resources. My heart for us at Rock Valley Bible Church, however, is that God would receive all the credit for what he has accomplished among us. And a prominent prayer meeting only helps this.

K. P. Yohannan continues, "Many set up their churches and lives much like their secular businesses and careers. With or without the blessing and presence of God, religion goes on like a well-oiled machine."

And this may be OK for some of you, but it causes me some concern at your pastor. I mean, what are we doing? Are we simply a social experiment with a bit of God poured into the mix?

I'm concerned about our prayer meeting, because I believe that it reflects something about us. It reflects our American pride and power; that we can go on for months and years on end without diligently seeking the face of God Yet because of our comfort, we have no need to follow hard after God. And we are lax. Because, we have the resources that we need.

How about taking this test? "What do you regularly pray about? Is it not those things over which you have no control? And what don't you have control over? Maybe health? Maybe safety in travel? Why did James say, ...

James 2:5

Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

The poor are rich in faith, because they have nowhere else to turn, but to God. I have heard it said that you don't need to teach a hungry man how to beg. But, the satisfied man has no need to ask.

And so, my message this morning is a call to all of us to seek the face of God in prayer. And if you haven't noticed, it's much different than my regular preaching. Normally, we turn in our Bibles to a passage and open it and explain it and apply it. But, this morning, my message is totally topical. But, as I said at the beginning of my message, it's coming with a burden. My hope and prayer is that it would not fall on deaf ears.

My message this morning is entitled, "Circles of Prayer." I want to begin with the inner-most, smallest circle of prayer that exists in your life, and work our way outwards. So, my first point this morning is this:

## 1. Pray Alone

This is the foundation of all prayer. It's you, with your Bible, alone with God, communing with the Lord.

This is how Jesus often prayed -- alone. Turn in your Bibles to Luke, chapter 5. Look at verse 16.

Luke 5:16

But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

The idea here is that it was his pattern, to slip away into a secluded place to pray. This is the thing that Jesus did. The New American Standard Bible says this, ...

Luke 5:16

But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

And how easy is it for us to think that Jesus lived a different life than we did. We are so busy, but Jesus simply walked the countryside with his disciples, without a care in the world. But, did you notice verse 15?

Luke 5:15

But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.

The picture of verse 15 is crowds upon crowds, pressing in to see him to touch him, to feel his healing touch. The picture isn't of calm tranquility. The picture is of chaos and busyness. In fact, Mark's gospel told of the time that Jesus "went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat" (Mark 3:20). And so, Jesus went away to pray alone, not because he had the time just to go and pray. But, because he was so busy, that he had to get alone to pray.

And when our lives our busy, we have to get alone to pray. And in doing so, Jesus was following his own advice. Turn over to Matthew 6. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, ...

Matthew 6:5-6

when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Do you have a secret place? Do you have a place where you can get alone to pray? My exhortation to you this morning is this: Pray Alone.

Do you want to know how to pray when you are alone? Jesus tells us.

Matthew 6:7-13

"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

I would encourage you to pray this prayer. Oh, it's not that you need to pray the words of this prayer, over and over again. But, I encourage you to pick up the themes. Notice how Jesus begins with God and his glory and his kingdom. Only half way through his text does he come to requests. And these are basic requests. For food. For forgiveness. For victory over sin.

When you are looking for something to pray about, pray through the Scriptures. I love the way that John Piper models prayer through the words of Scripture. [\[4\]](#) So, when you get alone to pray, read the Bible and let it form and fashion your prayers.

Donald Whitney (a professor at Southern Seminary) wrote a blog post entitled, "How I Started Praying the Bible." He writes, ...

It was the first of March, 1985. I remember where I was sitting when it happened.

I was pastor of a church in the western suburbs of Chicago. A guest preacher was speaking at a series of meetings at our church. He was teaching on the prayers of the apostle Paul found in his New Testament letters, and encouraging us to pray these inspired prayers as our own.

Then, at one point he held up his Bible said, "Folks, when you pray, use the prayer book."

In that moment I suddenly realized, "The entire Bible is a prayer book. We can pray not only the prayers of Paul in Ephesians, we can pray everything in the Book of Ephesians."

So I started praying each day through one of the passages in my daily Bible reading. Soon I was reading in the Psalms and found it easy to make the words of the psalmist my own prayers.

For example, I read, "How precious is your steadfast love, O God!" (Ps. 36:7), and spoke King David's exact words as my own prayer, immediately adding other thoughts prompted by David's exclamation.

After I'd said all that came to mind from verse 7, I read verse 8: "They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them to drink of the river of your delights."

"Yes, Lord!", I prayed, "Let me feast on the abundance of your house; let me drink of the river of your delights. Feed my soul with your goodness. Satisfy my thirsty heart with your delights. Let me be immersed in the vast, deep, incomparable river of knowing you."

I simply spoke to the Lord those things prompted verse-by-verse in my reading of the psalm. If a verse didn't suggest anything to pray, I would go to the next verse. On and on through the psalm, praying as prompted by the things I read, I continued until I ran out of time.

I discovered that praying the Bible helped me stay focused and minimized the tendency of my mind to wander. I stopped saying the same old things about the same old things when I prayed. And yet, I found that I still prayed about the things I wanted to pray for each day, but I stopped using the tired, repetitive phrases I typically used.

Using this approach also gave me a much greater sense of conversing with God. Instead of the usual me-centered monologue that I hoped the Lord would hear, I read what he said in the Bible, then spoke to him in response. When I finished, I turned to the words of God again, after which I spoke with him about what he had just said in Scripture. Throughout my time in prayer I kept alternating between God speaking in his Word and my speaking to him in response—just like a real conversation.

Eventually I discovered that what I'd stumbled upon was in fact an ancient Christian practice. Jesus prayed psalms on the cross (see Matt 27:46 and Luke 23:46). Followers of Jesus in the Book of Acts (4:23-26) prayed psalms. And many prayerful people since Bible times (such as George Müller) practiced praying the Bible. Regrettably, I'd never been taught this simple, satisfying method of taking the words of Scripture and turning them into prayer.

So March 1, 1985, was a day that forever changed my life, and changed virtually every day of my life since. And now, having prayed the Bible almost daily for thirty years, I can testify that there is nothing in all my devotional life that more quickly and consistently kindles my consistently cold heart like praying the Bible.

It is gratifying to be able to share with you something that has been so meaningful to me for so long. I hope you will find the practice of praying the Bible equally meaningful and helpful in your own prayer life. [\[5\]](#)

I hope that helps.

So, Pray Alone. Let's move on to my second point, ...

## 2. Pray With Your Spouse

Now, I know that this is impossible for many of you. It's impossible for the children, as they aren't yet married. It's impossible for those whose husband has passed away. So, if this is impossible for you, hang in there. Someday, Lord willing, you may be able to apply this message.

Also, I know that this is very difficult for others. Particularly, I'm thinking about those of you who are married to an unbeliever. You are married to someone who has no interest in God or the Bible. Why would they be interested in praying?

I would still encourage you to try. Perhaps you want to ask your spouse if he/she would mind if you prayed. Perhaps at dinner, perhaps at night, he or she might not mind. You aren't asking that they pray. You are asking that they listen to you pray. I would encourage you to keep it short. But, keep it authentic and true.

Now, for the rest of us who have a believing spouse, it should be easy right? You believe in Jesus. Your spouse believes in Jesus. So, pray.

Yet sadly, the number of wives and husbands that regularly pray together is actually very small. My guess is less than half of you pray together regularly. My guess is less than half of half of you married folks pray together regularly.

Did you know that something like 10% of Christian couples actually pray together? My hope is that the percentage is higher here at Rock Valley Bible Church. I really don't know. But, I do know this, that there are enough of you that my counsel will help.

So, how do you pray together as couples? First of all, see the need. Admittedly, there is no command in all of the Bible that tells husbands and wives to pray together. But there are some passages that come close.

Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 5. This is the great marriage chapter. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22). Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). Look at verse 31, ...

Ephesians 5:31

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

We are talking here about unity -- unity of heart, unity of soul, unity of flesh. The marriage bed helps to create unity of flesh. And prayer helps to create unity of spirit. And the best way to do this is to pray together.

So, see the need to pray. Second, find a place to pray. If you are going to pray together, you need to be together. So, I ask you, "When are you together?"

There are two times in the day when Yvonne and I are together regularly. In the morning when we wake up and shower and get ready for the day. In the evening when we go to bed at night. And, not coincidentally, these are the times that we pray together. We pray together in the morning. We pray together at night.

Not always. But, regularly enough that those are our times of prayer. And regular prayer together has helped us in our crisis moments. Whether it's a child we are concerned about. Whether it's a financial concern. Whether it's a particular difficulty at church. Whether it's sin in our own marriage. Our praying together regularly has helped us to come to the place where we have prayed together during times of crisis. And those prayer times have been more extended than our regular times of prayer.

First, see the need to pray. Second, find a place to pray. Third, keep it short.

Nothing will dampen the spirit of praying together than long-winded prayers. Now, after some time of praying together, you can work up to longer prayers. But don't expect long sessions of prayer together to continue for long, until you have developed a mutual maturity together.

Let's move on to my third point, ...

### **3. Pray With Your Family**

Again, this won't apply to everyone here this morning. If you live alone, it's difficult to pray with your family. But, if you live with others, you can apply this point like this, ...

### **3. Pray With Those You Live With**

The most simple and straightforward passage of Scripture that addresses this is right here in Ephesians. Look at chapter 6 and verse 4. It says this, ...

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

The responsibility of you, fathers, is to train your children in the ways of the Lord. This involves many areas. It involves disciplining them when they go astray. It involves instructing them in the right way. It involves teaching them the Bible. It involves modeling a life of godliness. It involves extending them a lot of grace in the process. And, it also involves showing them how to pray.

I believe the best way to do this is in Family Worship. That is, gathering your family for worship, singing, Bible reading, and prayer. It's not hard, but it does require some effort. Dads, I put this on you. Unless, of course, there's no dad in the house or dad is an unbeliever, then the responsibility falls on you, mom).

Think about the time in your life that your whole family is together. And rather than watching television; and rather than putzing on the computer; and rather than playing video games, dads, gather your family for a time of worship together.

This was much easier to do when our children were younger than it is today. Our kids are out so much with their activities. And I haven't been perfect in every way. But, it is enough the norm in our family that we gather to worship the Lord together. In the evening when we are together, and (pertinent to my point this morning), a portion of this includes praying together.

Sometimes it is me praying. Sometimes we go through the family (youngest to oldest). And as they are young, we often instruct them for things to pray for. But as they mature, they can come up with their own prayers. It's a way of maturity.

If you want more help on this, I have produced a little brochure entitled, "Is Family Worship Practiced in Your Home?"

I distinctly remember the place. I also remember the time. About nine years ago I walked into a Christian bookstore and saw a book, whose title intrigued me. It was called, "Thoughts on Family Worship," by J. W. Alexander. At that time, I had never heard of J. W. Alexander. Neither had I heard of "Family Worship," though I had some inkling of what it meant. As a man who was recently married and beginning my own family, I was intrigued. So I purchased it and read it and began to practice Family Worship in our home. It has been a staple in our home for the past nine years and will continue to be as long as I live.

What is Family Worship?

Family worship is called by many names. I have heard it called the "Family Altar." I have heard it called, "Family Devotions." One family I know of has affectionately calls it, "Dee-voes." It is simply the practice of a regular family gathering for the purpose of worshiping God. It can take as little as five minutes, or, on occasion, it may extend to an hour. It may occur in the morning, in the evening, or just before bed. It may take place around the kitchen table, on the sofa, in the living room, or in a bedroom of a little one. Typically, songs of praise are sung, the Bible is read, and prayer is offered to God.

Forms vary. In our home, the form is constantly changing. When my family consisted of just my wife and me, we simply read the Bible together and prayed in our bedroom. As the children were young, we sang many Bible songs over and over to ingrain them into their little minds while they danced around the living room. At times, the children have enjoyed acting out the story we have read. As the children have grown older, we have begun to focus our attention upon singing hymns and consecutive reading through the Bible. Yet, through it all, the basic forms have remained: songs, Bible reading, and prayer.

Is Family Worship Required of Us?

I must admit that the words, "Family Worship" or "Family Altar" or "Family Devotions" are nowhere used in the Bible. Furthermore, I will admit that there are few explicit directions given to families to gather for worship of God. Yet, there are clear directions given to the priority of cultivating spiritual health and maturity within the family.

When given the law, Israel was instructed, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Parents were told to love God supremely and to teach their children to love God as well. God's word was to saturate their conversations with their children, whether they were at home or abroad.

Whether it was early in the morning or late at night, God's word was always to be on their lips. Family worship is an important way for parents to model their supreme love for God and teach their children to do the same. Joshua pledged, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh 24:15).

In the New Testament we see that fathers are told, "do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Family worship provides a great opportunity to teach your children of the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Also, when the qualifications for an elder for a church are given, the home is to be examined (1 Tim. 3:4-5). If one will lead a church in spiritual matters, he ought to be leading his home as well.

Scripture is also clear that the believer is to be in constant communion with God. David said, "I shall call upon God, and the Lord will save me" (Ps. 55:16). He said that he would do this at "evening and morning and at noon" (Ps. 55:17). The Psalmist said, "Seven times a day I praise Thee, because of Thy righteous ordinances" (Ps. 119:164). In the New Testament, we are told that we are

to "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:16-18). A constant communion with God ought to give expression in members of a family gathering for these things together.

So clear are the implications of these things, that when the Scottish General Assembly adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1674, they considered that the neglect of family worship was grounds for church discipline! They wrote that the elders were "to make diligent search and enquiry, in the congregations committed to their charge respectively, whether there be among them any family or families which use to neglect this necessary duty [i.e. of family worship]; and if any such family be found, the head of the family is to be first admonished privately to amend his fault; and, in case of his continuing therein, he is to be gravely and sadly reproofed by the session; after which reproof, if he be found still to neglect Family worship, let him be, for his obstinacy in such an offence, suspended and debarred from the Lord's

supper, as being justly esteemed unworthy to communicate therein, till he amend."

#### Is Family Worship a Reality in Your Home?

Sadly, family worship is neglected in many homes today. In his book, *Thoughts on Family Worship*, J. W. Alexander gives nine excuses that the head of the household might be using to justify his own neglect leading his home in family worship. I have listed them here with my own brief comments and encouragements.

#### Excuses for the Neglect of Family Worship.

1. The service, as I have seen it, is a dull formality; and my house is as well without it. The misuse of something doesn't mean that we shouldn't use it correctly. The worship of God ought never to be dull.
2. Family Worship may be well enough in itself, but it does not fall in with the customs of my house and my guests. Favorite television shows, late nights out, and protesting children are all obstacles. Such customs, however, ought to magnify the great need of your house to focus hearts God-ward.
3. I have not time for Family Worship. Schedules and meetings and activities will always battle for your time. You need to prayerfully evaluate your household priorities in light of eternity.
4. Our family is so small. It ought to be easier for you to gather for worship. Certainly a husband and wife can find a few minutes each day for this practice.
5. My family is so large. With a large family comes greater responsibility. Think of the multiplied effects of your neglect of family worship.
6. There are persons present in my house whose superior age or intelligence deters me from duty. Your attempts at leadership will be respected.
7. I am unlearned, and destitute of gifts. Can you read? Perhaps you could begin by reading a devotional book to your family. Many such helps are in print today.
8. My family is unwilling to unite in the service. Stand strong, like Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh 24:15).
9. The truth is, I am ashamed to begin. Ahhhh, now we are getting somewhere!

Finally, we come to our final point this morning, ...

## 4. Pray With Your Church

I do believe that there is sufficient Scriptural warrant for this. Turn to Acts, chapter 1. Shortly after Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples seemed lost and confused and without direction. So, they gathered together to pray.

Acts 1:12-14

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Do you notice how the early church responded? They were "devoting themselves to prayer" (verse 14). What was modeled in the early church was later commanded by the apostle Paul.

Colossians 4:2 (NASB)  
Be devoted to prayer

When Paul said that, did he have in mind, simply a "praying alone?" Or, did he have in mind the circles of prayer that I have talked about today? Pray With Your Spouse; Pray With Your Family; Pray With Your Church. If you are "devoted" to it, I think that all of these things follow.

And this wasn't the only time when the early church was "devoted to prayer." Look at Acts 2:42.

Acts 2:42  
And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Furthermore, we see prayer meetings in the early church.

Acts 4:23-31

When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

"Why did the Gentiles rage,  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers were gathered together,  
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and

Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

My heart’s desire is that we would experience much of the same thing at Rock Valley Bible Church. My desire is that we would be together praying, that we would be together seeking the Lord, that we would be together giving thanks to God. And that he would shake this place.

But, it can’t happen unless you make that commitment to come and pray with us.

I know that over the years, many of you have come to the prayer meeting. I make some mention of our prayer meeting on Sunday morning and you think, “Hey, that must be a place that I should attend.” And so you have come. And you have seen how few people attend and how feeble we are at praying together, and haven’t returned again. You have only come once. This is the experience of many of you. I know, because I have been there. I have seen it.

But, I want to encourage you this morning for a vision of what our prayer meeting could be. And come and be committed to it. And it may just be that your presence is enough to encourage others to come.

Think about the early days of Rock Valley Bible Church. When we gathered for the first time, we had something like 14 people at that first meeting, and half of them were my family. We had two kids at the time and my parents came. What would have happened if people came to our gathering, saw how small it was and said, “That’s not anything.” And never returned? We would never have the church we have today.

Similarly, I want to encourage you to be committed to a vision for the prayer meeting, and all it could be. But, what’s interesting about the prayer meeting is this. We can’t just be everything that we want it to be. We can’t put on some show. We need you to come and fill the place with your praises and petitions to God.

And the only way is to say, “We are committed to this. We are going to come to church an hour earlier than has been our habit in the past. Even if there are only a few. We see the importance of praying with the church. And we are going to come.”

Now, you may have all of the excuses in the world. It’s too early. I don’t like to pray publicly. I find it boring. Not many people come. My kids will be a disruption. It’s only going to be the grace of God that will see you overcome your excuses.

Perhaps the day will come when people will look back on the history of Rock Valley Bible Church and say, “What happened in 2016 that turned that church to be so vibrant?” It was the commitment of the church body to praying together. And God was faithful to hear and answer their prayers.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 3, 2016 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] C. H. Spurgeon, *Spiritual Revival, the Want of the Church*, Sermon No. 2598. (<https://archive.spurgeon.org/sermons/2598.php>).

[2] Charles Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting* (Great Britain: Christians Focus Publications, 2000), 9.

[3] K. P. Yohannan, *The Road to Reality: Coming Home to Jesus from the Unread World* (Altamonte Springs, FL: Creation House, 1988), 95-96. You can read it online here: <http://archive.org/details/roadtorealitycom00yoha>.

[4] <https://vimeo.com/148557763>

[5] <http://www.sbts.edu/blogs/2015/12/31/how-i-started-praying-the-bible/>