

COMMITMENT #3

A STRONG CHURCH IS GROWING IN SPIRIT-DEPENDENCE AND PRAYER.

The key to the church's engagement with the world is the church's engagement with God.

—Richard Neuhaus

DEFINITION

We have been adopted as sons and daughters, and by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we cry out, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6). The Spirit empowers, reminds, convicts, reveals, comforts, guides, proclaims, and aids in our prayer to the Father (Rom. 8:26-27). The Holy Spirit is the power-source for the mission of making disciples (Acts 1:8). A strong church is comprised of regenerate believers who commune with God in Spirit, Word, and prayer. A strong church is built up by the diverse gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12-14). A strong church prays together regularly in worship and in discernment regarding a litany of decisions that must be made. A strong church is learning desperation through weakness and coming to increasingly believe we do our best work in prayer.

QUOTES TO PONDER...

The essence of spiritual renewal is the love of God poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). —Richard F. Lovelace, Dynamics of Spiritual Life

Spiritual gifts are not God bestowing to His people something external to Himself. They are not some tangible “stuff” or substance separable from God. Spiritual gifts are nothing less than God Himself in us, energizing our souls, imparting revelation to our minds, infusing power in our wills and working His sovereign and gracious purposes through us. —Sam Storms

I think humble saintly people on their knees before God brings miracles.... [I]f you don't believe that, why do you pray? —Dr. John Hannah

Prayer gets us in on what God is doing. —Eugene H. Peterson

Discernment is a quality of attentiveness to God that, over time, develops into the ability to sense God's heart and purpose in any given moment. We become familiar with the tone, quality and content of God's voice. We notice how God is present for us in the moment. —Ruth Haley Barton

Egocentricity and self-control are fundamental dynamics of the human condition. We know we are supposed to surrender to God's will and may genuinely want to, but most of us continue to face the almost irresistible tendency to assert our own will. We overhear Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane—“Not my will by thine be done”—but we have trouble making it our own. —David Benner

It's hard to overstate the value of praying together, whether as husband and wife, as a team of leaders, or as a whole church. —Terry Virgo



BIBLE STUDY

Read the following passages in Acts.

Acts 1:12-14, 24

Acts 8:14-17

Acts 16:13, 16, 25-26

Acts 2:42

Acts 9:40-42

Acts 20:36-38

Acts 3:1-3

Acts 12:5,12-17

Acts 21:4-6

Acts 4:31 (23-24a, 31-35)

Acts 13:1-3

Acts 22:17

Acts 6:3-6

Acts 14:23

Acts 28:8

If you had spent three and a half years with Jesus, what do you think your first instinct would have led you to do after Christ ascended? What is the first thing that the disciples did (Acts 1:12-14)?

What else stands out to you in various passages related to the practice of prayer in the early church?

What is your working definition of “devoted”? How often and how fervently does a community have to attend to a practice to rightly be considered “devoted” to it?

QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

Are your elders strong in prayer individually? Collectively? If the entire church looked like the elder team, how devoted to prayer would the church be?

Do your elders and leaders have a practice of discerning God’s will together? What does that look like?



How do you respond to the statement: “Corporate prayer is the highest leverage activity that a church can engage in”? What are you working on that you believe will produce more fruit in and through the life of your disciples?

How needy is your church for God? On the scale of respectable, competent people vs. desperate, needy people, where do most people see themselves?

How would you rate your church currently on the Martha (activism/productivity) vs. Mary (prayerful enjoyment of God’s presence) spectrum? How strong of a sense of expectation do your people have that God is present and at work in their lives? Do people record prayers, excited to see how God will answer?

How are people equipped to grow in prayer currently? How often is this kind of experience or training available to disciples?

Do you have any regular rhythm of recounting ways that God has answered prayers of the community? What does that look like?

COMMITTED TO ACTION

What’s one thing you or your team could do this week to strengthen this area?

What would it take to see this commitment strengthened over the next year?

