

Let Us Pray... Without Delay!

Steve Burchett

They didn't complain. They didn't doubt. They didn't even strategize. Once Peter and John reported their imprisonment and the threats they had received for preaching the gospel, they immediately prayed with a gathering of believers in Jerusalem (see Acts 4:23-31). As I once heard, "Prayer was their first choice, not their last chance."



Here's what they asked from God: "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" (vv. 29-30).

God responded right away: "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" (v. 31).

Fooling the Israelites

If only the Israelites would have been as wise as these first century believers. God had promised them Canaan. However, once the Israelites were in the Promised Land, they were to drive out the "Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites" (Deuteronomy 20:17). But in Joshua 9, the Gibeonites (who were Hivites [cf. 11:19]) deceived the Israelites by leading them to believe that they had journeyed from a foreign land. Their worn-out sandals and ragged clothes duped the Israelites. You can imagine the Jewish leaders conferring with one another: "These people are obviously not from Canaan—just look at them. Even their bread is crumbly and their wineskins are old and cracked." They unwisely made a covenant with the Gibeonites to let them live.

Three days later, the truth came out, and the negative consequences followed quickly: "Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders" (9:18). Problems would also arise in the future. The Lord had told Israel not to make a covenant with these nations, "lest they make you sin against me" (Exodus 32:33).

Why did this happen? How did they make such an unwise decision? Joshua 9:14 provides the answer: "So the men [of Israel] took some of their provisions, *but did not ask counsel from the Lord*" (emphasis added). Like the believers in Acts 4, they should have prayed immediately, but they didn't even pray at all.

A Foolish Young Pastor

I didn't make prayer a priority in an extremely trying incident that occurred early in my first pastorate. A large group of long-time members left the church for non-disciplinable reasons. They resigned their membership on a Tuesday, and we had our monthly members' meeting the next day.

Where did I go wrong? I very proudly went into the Wednesday meeting and informed the remaining members about those who were leaving. I then forcefully declared that we needed to remove them from the membership right away. I was so quick to tell them what "God wanted," without much prayer at all (other than praying briefly at the beginning of the meeting). I also paid little attention to the fact that people were hurting and confused since many of the people who left were longtime, close friends with those who stayed.

How foolish!

What would have been the right course of action? I should have walked into the meeting that night, explained what happened the previous day, and then said, "We need God right now. We need the wisdom that He promises to give to those who ask for it. We're going to take the rest of our time together and pray."

What About You?

When the difficult situation arises in your life, do you pray immediately, or only after you are done complaining? When the life-changing decision is before you, are you quick to ask God for wisdom? Since you learned of the disease, have you cried out to the doctors more than to God?

If you are a leader in your church, do you make prayer a priority? Is there a significant amount of time for it in your gatherings? Do you spend more time making announcements to the people than talking to God? And when the controversy comes in the life of your church, what happens first—a strategy session, or a prayer meeting?

"Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." (John 16:24)

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