

Union United Methodist Church

Sermon Outline: **Spiritual Growth Part 2: The Power of Prayer**

August 21st, 2022. Pastor Michael Larbi

Readings: **2 Chronicles 7; Luke 18:1-8**

1. **Called to a Life of Prayer**

As individuals and as a Church we are called to a life of prayer. A lifestyle of consistent and regular prayer habit transforms us, draws us closer to God, matures us spiritually in the process, etc.

- **Persevering & Unceasing Prayer**

Jesus told the parable of Luke 18:1-8 to teach us that we "**need to pray always and not to lose heart.**" We are to cry out to the Lord "**day and night.**" Luke 18:1, 7 NRSV

Paul was inspired to urge, "**pray without ceasing.**" 1 Thessalonians 5:17 NRSV

- **A House of Prayer**

"the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant— these **I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; ... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.**" Isaiah 56:6-7 NRSV.

Jesus quoted this in Mark 11:17

Our church should be a house of prayer. In addition, every Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). We should continually be in prayer.

- **Prayer Can Change the Course of a Nation**

On dedication of the first temple in Israel, the Lord said to Solomon:

"if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

2 Chronicles 7:14 NIV

There is so much to prayer; I only give an inkling of the power of prayer here.

2. Inspiring Prayer Victory Stories from 3 Continents

A. Great Britain - Early Methodism

o Problem/Background

Moral decay in 18th century British society (similar to what led to the French Revolution)

- o The Methodist revival was a “reaction” to this moral decay in Britain¹
- o The Wesley brothers (John & Charles) went to Oxford at the “lowest point in history of that university”²
 - Life in oxford mirrored the sins of society then: “**half-heartedness, lawlessness, and irreverence**”³
e.g. one professor “remembered that he had a salary to receive, and forgot that he had a duty to perform”⁴
 - Ministers and bishops lived a life of ease and did not vigorously preach against sin and the ills of society, did not evangelize, etc.

o **Methodist Reaction & Outcome**

The vision and mission of John Wesley and his colleagues was to spread “scriptural holiness” through the land (Britain) - and they succeeded spectacularly.

o **Prayer and fasting was a big reason for their success:**

John Wesley practiced this from his Oxford days till his death over 50 years later: “While we were at Oxford, **the rule of every Methodist was**, (unless in case of sickness) **to fast every Wednesday and Friday in the year, in imitation of the Primitive Church**; for which they had the highest reverence.”⁵

“If thy labour or bodily strength will not allow for thy **fasting twice in the week**, however, deal faithfully with thy own soul, and fast as often as thy

¹ The word “reaction” used to describe the Methodist Revival is picked up from Julia Wedgewood’s writings.

² Wedgewood, Julia. *John Wesley and the Evangelical Reaction of the Eighteenth Century*, p39

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Wesley, John. Sermon 122: “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” 1789

strength will permit. *Omit no public, no private opportunity of pouring out thy soul in prayer*⁶

*"... taking up the cross, even that of fasting and early rising, without which it is impossible to grow in grace."*⁷

- ***In times of national crisis Wesley called for fasting***

e.g., 1744 threat of French invasion, he writes: "we observe Friday, February 17th, as a day of solemn fasting and prayer"⁸

- ***Role of Prayer & Fasting in Methodist Revival & Growth***

Minutes of 3rd Methodist Conference - May 12, 1746.

- Before someone is accepted as a preacher: "**We will desire the congregation to join with us in fasting and prayer, that we may judge and act according to the will of God.**"
- "Q. 10. *Should we not use the same method of fasting and prayer on other occasions also?* a. Without doubt we should use it:
 1. At the receiving any fellow labourer in our Lord's vineyard;
 2. At going ourselves, or sending any, to a new place;
 3. Before publishing any book."
- This was an imitation of how Paul and Barnabas came to be sent as apostles (Acts 13:1-4)

B. Ghana - Late 20th Century to Date

- ***Problem/Background***

- Military Coup - 1979 - populist anti-corruption "revolution"
 - many killings (including execution of 2 former heads of state and 4 ex-military ministers of state by firing squad)
 - public floggings (including "corrupt" women traders in the market)
 - I was in boarding school with 2 lovely Christian daughters of one officer killed by firing squad

⁶ Wesley, John. Sermon: "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," Discourse V

⁷ Wesley, John. Sermon 68: "The Wisdom of God's Counsels"

⁸ Wedgwood, Julia. *John Wesley and the Evangelical Reaction of the Eighteenth Century*, p302

- This “revolution” lasted 3 months ... handover to civilian elected government
- Military Coup - 1981 - same military officers!
 - abduction and murder of 3 high court judges
 - military government in power for 11 years
 - corruption didn’t cease!
- Famine - 1983
- Decline of mainline churches - e.g., Methodist, Presbyterian denominations
- ***Reaction of Christians & Churches***
 - Regular seasons of fasting and prayer by many groups and churches
 - All-night prayer meetings (weekly, fortnightly, monthly)
 - Early morning prayer meetings
 - Courageous preaching
 - focus on changing of hearts
 - increased evangelism and disciple-making
- ***Outcome***
 - Powerful revival!
 - Explosive gospel growth: many new churches and revival of old Christian traditions
 - Political & economic stability
 - no more coups since 1981
 - democratic elections in 1992
 - peaceful changes of government to opposition through elections, rule of law, etc.

C. Korea - 20th Century to Date

- ***Problem/Background***
 - Protestant missionaries from various denominations **arrived last quarter of 19th Century** e.g., in 1885, Underwood (Presbyterian) and Appenzeller (Methodist) arrived in Seoul
 - **Pyongyang Revival: 1907** Resulting in more Christian North
 - Japanese Occupation: 1910-1945

- Nation splits into North Korea and South Korea after 2nd World War * Many of North Korea's communist leaders had Christian grandparents
- Korean War - 1950-1953 results in *painful family splits *widespread poverty and despair *suppression of church and freedoms in the North *Many Christian leaders migrate to South
- Great Industrialisation movement transforms South Korea into economic giant *새마을 (Saemaul) - New Village Movement launched in April 1970 - "overcome poverty and create wealth" drive, transforming an agrarian nation into an industrialized one.
- Korean War technically not over!
- In 1970 Methodist Church in Korea was in decline - largest Methodist church in Korea had 500 members

- ***Reaction of Christians & Churches***

- The Korean Church - A Praying Church
Virtually all churches in Korea have **daily dawn prayer meetings that have continued for decades**. Many also have **designated secluded places and mountains where people go to pray all year round**.
- Testimony of *Rev. Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho, Founder of Yoido Full Gospel Church (largest church in the world, started in 1956)*:
"Since we had no members to minister to in the beginning, we both got up at 4:30 in the morning and prayed together until seven, then after having breakfast we prayed again until noon. After a short rest, we prayed together until the evening. God allowed us to be partners and guided us to pray to Him daily for ten hours, because He was teaching us how to start His church and how to pray to Him."⁹
Reaction to a difficult situation:
"I sensed that something terrible was on the verge of unfolding. I believed it was persecution, a spiritual battle, a war. Sister Choi and I fell on our knees before God; we had no choice but to cling to Him again. We had no time to belabor the situation. We began fasting and prayed earnestly and tearfully."¹⁰

⁹ Cho, David Yonggi; Beverlee Chadwick. *Dr. David Yonggi Cho: Ministering Hope for 50 Years*, p 31

¹⁰ Ibid., p48

- **Outcome**

- Korean Church grew from about 2% of the population¹¹ after the Korean War in 1953 to about 25% of the population at one point. The percentage has fallen somewhat but the Church is still very prominent in the nation. Sends missionaries round the world.
- By 2007, five of the world's largest mega churches were in South Korea.¹² Examples:
 - Yoido Full Gospel Church - by 1973, 18,000; by 1984, 400,000; 1 million members at one point before making many branches independent
 - **Kwanglim Methodist Church**, where I served as an intern for 2 years. 1970: 150 members, Bishop Sundo Kim became Senior Pastor. 1998: 85,000 members when their Prayer Mountain was dedicated. Today, has approximately 100,000 members.

3. Our Prayer Calling

As individuals and as a Church the Lord calls us to be people who pray. Prayer should be like the air we breathe to us. We grow as we draw closer to God in prayer. We can influence our nation, our families, our places of work, etc. for Christ as we pray.

- **"if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."**
2 Chronicles 7:14 NIV
- **The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.**
Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. James 5:16-17 NIV
- **This is what the LORD says**, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it - the LORD is his name: "**Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.**" Jeremiah 33:2-3 NIV

¹¹ The Economist, "Why South Korea is so distinctly Christian," August 2014

¹² The Economist, "O come all ye faithful," November 2007