

Devoted to Prayer

Message 1 of 4 in the series: "Devoted 2022"

A. God wants us to be devoted to prayer.

"Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart." Colossians 4:2 (NLT)

- Devoted = loyal, loving, committed, true.
- Prayer = the act or practice of spiritual communion with God.

"I love the Lord because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy. Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!" Psalm 116:1-2 (NLT)

B. Fortunately, Jesus taught His disciples a lot about being devoted to prayer.

1. Being devoted to prayer means **never giving up**.

"One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and **never give up**. 'There was a judge in a certain city,' he said, 'who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, "Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy." The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, "I don't fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!" Then the Lord said, 'Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don't you think God will surely give justice to **his chosen people** who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, **how many will he find on the earth who have faith?**'" Luke 18:1-8 (NLT)

Note: This is a parable of **contrast**.

- We are NOT ignored widows, we are God's chosen people! "Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to **adopt us into his own family** by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure." Ephesians 1:4-5 (NLT)
- God cares deeply about us, and He is NOT unjust. "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. My enemies will retreat when I call to you for help. This I know: **God is on my side!** I praise God for what he has promised; yes, I praise the Lord for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?" Psalm 56:8-11 (NLT)

Note: This parable reminds us that authentic prayer requires **faith**.

- We give up on praying because God hasn't met our expectations in the past. "...if the Lord is with us, **why has all this happened to us?** And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about?" Judges 6:13a (NLT)
- We give up on praying because we believe our problems are too big/too hard for God to handle. "...Have mercy on us and help us, if you can.' '**What do you mean, "If I can"?**' Jesus asked. 'Anything is possible if a person believes.' The father instantly cried out, 'I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!'" Mark 9:22b-24 (NLT)

Life Application: We need to trust God and keep praying.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; **do not depend on your own understanding**. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take." Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

"Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble and **keep on praying**." Romans 12:12 (NLT)

2. Being devoted to prayer means humbly presenting our requests to God.

"Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: 'Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: "I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income." But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, "O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner." I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and **those who humble themselves will be exalted.**'"

Luke 18:9-14 (NLT)

Note: Jesus HATES religious pretense. “Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they like to parade around in flowing robes and receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces. And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head table at banquets. Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be more severely punished.” Mark 12:38-40 (NLT)

Life Application: We need to pray simple, direct, honest prayers.

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!”

Matthew 6:5-8 (NLT)

Note: The Holy Spirit will help us when we don’t know what to pray. “And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.” Romans 8:26 (NLT)

3. Being devoted to prayer means spending time in prayer with God as His children.

“One day some parents brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But when the disciples saw this, they scolded the parents for bothering him. Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, ‘Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.’” Luke 18:15-17 (NLT)

Note: Little children look forward to spending time with parents and grandparents who love them. They come excitedly, openly, expectantly, full of trust, with total dependence and complete sincerity.

Life Application: We need to look forward to times of prayer with God and come excitedly, openly, expectantly, full of trust, with total dependence and complete sincerity.

“My heart has heard you say, ‘Come and talk with me.’ And my heart responds, ‘Lord, I am coming.’”

Psalm 27:8 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions

1. What does the word “devoted” mean to you? What do you think our church would look like if 100% of us became fully devoted to prayer?
2. Who is the most prayerful person you know? What is his/her secret? What things keep Christians from praying more than we do?
3. Read Luke 18:1-8 & then discuss the following questions:
 - How is God different from the judge in this story? (Psalm 56:8-11 & 103:8-14)
 - How are we different from the widow in this story? (Ephesians 1:4-5, Romans 8:15-17)
 - If Jesus returned today, would he find most Christians praying or worrying? (Proverbs 3:5-6, Philippians 4:6-7)
4. Read Luke 18:9-14 & then discuss the following questions:
 - How does Jesus feel about people who pray to be noticed by others? Why would anyone do this? (Mark 12:38-40)
 - How does Jesus want us to pray? (Matthew 6:5-8) Do you pray like this?
5. Read Luke 18:15-17. What do you think it means to be childlike in our relationship with the Lord? How would this impact our times of prayer? (Psalm 27:8 & 116:1-2)
6. Discuss the Prayer section of the Centerpoint Devoted Steps card. How would you like to grow in your understanding of prayer/ability to pray in 2023?
7. Spend some time praying as a group for our church. Ask God to help us become a church devoted to prayer. Ask God to help us grow in our desire to pray individually every day and in our commitment to praying with and for others as often as we can.