



Dynamics of Church Life

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God's Word	The Gospel	Spiritual Renewal	Dependent Prayer	Loving Community	United Mission
The Bible is our life and authority.	By his death & resurrection, Jesus gives us his Spirit and makes us God's children.	God's Spirit frees us to live more and more like Jesus in every area of our lives.	We thank our Father for his love and present our needs to him.	We follow Jesus in vital connection with other believers.	We invite everyone to follow Jesus with us.

Dependent Prayer

Throughout this series, we are using the word “dynamic” to mean “a force or property that stimulates change and growth in an organism.” We are highlighting six central “dynamics” at Trinity Baptist Church—the God’s Word, the Gospel, Spiritual Renewal, Dependent Prayer, Loving Community, and United Mission.

Jesus Prayer, Our Prayer, and the Spirit

During Jesus’ life on earth, he was devoted to prayer. He prayed when he was being baptized (Luke 3:21). He prayed before he selected his disciples (Luke 6:12). His prayers were so constant and unique that his disciples asked him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1-4). He gave lessons on how to pray persistently (Luke 18:1-8) and humbly (Luke 18:9-14). He prayed before he was arrested, and even while he was dying on the cross. By contrast, Jesus’ own followers didn’t pray much at all. They couldn’t cast a demon out from a demon-possessed boy because they hadn’t prayed (Mark 9:28). They even fell asleep during a prayer meeting in which Jesus repeatedly urged them to stay awake and pray (Mark 14:32-42).

But something changed after Jesus departed. Suddenly, it seems, his followers *wouldn't stop* praying. When we turn to the book of Acts, we see them “devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 2:14). What happened? In order for Jesus’ followers to pray like Jesus, *Jesus had to get inside them by giving them his Spirit*—and that is exactly what he did (John 15:26; 16:24). Living within Jesus’ followers, the Spirit of God freed them to live like Jesus, which includes praying like Jesus. It makes sense, then, why the letters of the New Testament speak of praying “in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18). Praying in the Spirit is not senseless babbling; rather, it is talking to God in a way that is motivated and enabled by the Spirit of God within us, assuring that we are his children, and therefore can pray to him as Father.

A Praying Church

In Colossians 4:2, Paul gives a brief but full exhortation to the church in Colossae: "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." From this, we learn that a church should (1) pray, (2) pray persistently, (3) pray expectantly, and (4) pray gratefully.

1. We must pray: "in prayer"

It should be obvious, but unfortunately in our fast-paced, results-driven society, prayer gets pushed to the side. Wherever a true church exists, however, there will be people who are given to prayer because they have the Spirit of Jesus within them, crying "Abba! Father!" It is also essential to note that the verb indicates that this is something the *church as a whole* ought to be doing *together*.

2. We must pray persistently: "continue steadfastly"

The Greek verb rendered "continue steadfastly" in the *ESV* conveys something even stronger than the phrase in English. The meaning is closer to "persist" or to "stick through with something." It suggests that prayer is not always easy, that we must have a specific object in mind, and that we, like Jacob of old, should wrestle with God in prayer (Genesis 32:22-32).

3. We must pray expectantly: "being watchful in it"

The opposite of being watchful is being sleepy, but Paul is saying something more than just staying awake during a drowsy prayer meeting. He means that we should be alert for God's answer to prayers. Sometimes our faith grows weaker because we don't expect an answer, and therefore are completely unaware when God does in fact answer our prayers.

4. We must pray gratefully: "with thanksgiving"

When we are alert to God's answers, we also commit ourselves to thanking God, even before he answers. Much of our prayer ought to be an outflow of gratitude, as Paul demonstrates in his writings. "Do not be anxious about anything," he urges the Christians in Philippi, "but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Discussion Questions

1. What are some factors that make it a struggle for individuals, churches, and their pastors to prioritize prayer?
2. Consider the contrast between Jesus' devoted prayer life and the initial lack of prayer among his followers. What changed after Jesus' departure, and how did it impact their prayer life?
3. Explore the significance of the Holy Spirit in enabling believers to pray like Jesus. How does praying "in the Spirit" differ from mere words or rituals?
4. Reflect on Colossians 4:2 and the exhortation to continue steadfastly in prayer. How can we cultivate a culture of persistent prayer within our church?
5. Reflect on the concept of praying expectantly and being watchful for God's answers. How does this mindset impact our faith and relationship with God?
6. Share strategies or practices that have helped you maintain a consistent prayer life. How can we overcome distractions and busyness to prioritize prayer?
7. What is one simple step you could take that would help our church be more devoted to prayer?