

# Acts 2:42-47 "A Dependent Community"

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Father, that's true. Thank you for showing me that fresh, even while they sang that song. The one who would speak your word is desperate for you.

Not in this moment only, but every moment. And all of us, we struggle to grasp control, to be in charge, to have things our way.

And what we need is you. And so we come to you this morning, a father who delights to give good gifts. To his children.

To give the Holy Spirit to those who ask for it. So we do ask that. Father, send your spirit. Send your spirit in ways we maybe haven't experienced him before.

[ 1 : 12 ] That we would see our need for you. And that we would delight, even. In being dependent on such a good father. Teach us.

Change us. In Jesus' name. Amen. We're in the middle of talking for a few weeks about what God tells us to be as a community.

As a church that he would use to see his kingdom advance in great ways. We've said that we want to be here not merely to play church. It's easy to do that.

But rather to be the kind of community together that by God's grace would storm the gates of hell. That God would bring revival here and elsewhere through us.

And as we talk about what that looks like today, something you might expect to hear. That we need to be dependent and prayerful. We've been talking about that this morning.

[ 2 : 16 ] It's the thing most people would associate with revival coming. People would think about that first. Easy to write it down and put that in your core values as a church.

But even as we did that, as leaders of this church, we said it's really important. And that is really hard for us.

In many ways, something we seem allergic to. Being dependent, prayerful. And we'll talk more about that in a minute. But first I want to share another story of God's powerful work with you.

I'm sharing these with you over these weeks because they involve normal people much like us. In places very similar to the one where God has placed us.

Where God has worked in them and through them in ways that would make our mouths gape. And our hearts leap with joy if we got to be a part of something like this.

[ 3 : 15 ] Last week in the 1700s with the Great Awakening. Today in the mid-1800s in New York City. It was exactly 12 noon on September 23rd, 1857.

A tall, middle-aged, former businessman climbed creaking stairs to the third story of an old church building in the heart of lower New York City. He entered an empty room, pulled out his pocket watch, and sat down to wait.

The placard outside read, Prayer meeting from 12 to 1 o'clock. Stop 5, 10, or 20 minutes, or the whole hour as your time admits. It looked like no one had the time.

As the minutes ticked by, the solitary waiter wondered if it were all a mistake. Jeremiah Lanphier was the last-ditch effort of the old Dutch North Church.

When many other churches had closed their doors and moved out of town, they had decided, despite having very few people left, to try hiring someone with no church experience or training, to visit the neighbors and seek to revive the church.

[ 4 : 29 ] And so, here he was. The minute hand of his watch pointed to 1230 when at last he heard a step on the stairs. One man came in, then another, and another, until there were six.

After a few minutes of prayer, the meeting was dismissed with the decision that another meeting would be held the following Wednesday. That small meeting was in no way extraordinary. There was no great outpouring of the Spirit of God.

Lanphier had no way of knowing that it was the beginning of a great national revival which would sweep an estimated one million persons into the kingdom of God.

The meeting of six grew to 20 and then 40. Within a month, it cleared 3,000. Within six months, over 10,000 were praying daily at noon in New York City alone.

And the revival was spreading to Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and many other cities all the way to the Pacific coast. People gathering to plead for God's help.

[ 5 : 35 ] Specific prayers for His deliverance. General prayers for God to save dying people in a dying nation. And many estimate around one million eternal souls saved in that one year alone, just a couple years before many of them would die in the Civil War and face eternity.

All of this amazing work of God called the layman's prayer revival. In other words, mostly untrained Christians gathering to cry out to God together.

In fact, one preacher said, there is such a general confidence in the prevalence of prayer that the people very extensively seem to prefer meeting for prayer to meeting for preaching.

The general impression seemed to be, we have had instruction until we are hardened. It is time for us to pray. Now, lest you get carried away, we have also read of God using the preaching of the cross of Christ from His Word to bring revival.

But, prayer. There is a reason you think of that when you think of revival. It is a repeated marker of revival. When God works, it is not always and usually just among seminary trained preachers.

[ 7 : 05 ] It is among untrained Christians who cry out to Him. Often, it begins with just a very few people like this did. Like others, Zinzendorf's round-the-clock prayer met three years round-the-clock before seeing revival break out.

And then it ran for a hundred years round-the-clock until a great breakthrough of missionary expansion of the Gospel took place. Over and over again, God stirs His people's hearts to pray because they are desperately dependent on Him to accomplish the mission that Christ has sent them on.

And that is really the bottom line this morning. It is what I want us to see. Here is a review of where we have been the last couple of weeks. First, we said that the church must be focused on Jesus. It is absolutely where it starts. Last week, a church centered on Jesus must be on the mission of God together. Moving outward toward others, right?

Today, a church on God's mission must be prayerfully dependent on God's strength. It is not profound, right?

[ 8 : 24 ] But a spirit of utter dependence reflected in a lifestyle of prayer. prayer. This is not something new. It didn't start in the 1800s.

And in fact, the early church in the book of Acts had prayer as a core commitment. Did you know that? Let's read Acts 2. This famous description of the early church that begins it at verse 42.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul.

And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

[ 9 : 24 ] And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. You hear what's happening in these verses? It's kingdom impact, right?

There's people being saved daily, needs being met, people being helped. We would love to be on mission like this community. And because it is, it's a community devoted, among other things, to prayer.

The words there, the prayers, likely indicate even specific set gatherings to pray together. What I want us to do for just a few minutes, rather than unpacking this particular passage or talking about how to pray, which is another helpful thing to do, is simply give you a snapshot of what this looks like in the early church.

The church that grows from a few fledgling disciples who really mess up more than they do anything right into this mission force that turns the world upside down. What does the beginning of that church look like? The book of Acts tells that story. And it is covered with prayer just a few places.

[10:39] Places. Chapter 1. As soon as Jesus leaves them, His followers gather to pray and wait for the Holy Spirit. Jesus has promised to send them so that they can be His witnesses on His mission.

And while they wait for what He has in store that none of them really could even imagine, what do they do? They pray. Verse 14. Devoting themselves to prayer.

As a matter of fact, as they pray, they realize they need to replace Judas. And so they pray for God's direction on who will replace Him. Chapter 2 of Acts includes the report we just read of their commitment to prayer, devotion to prayer.

In chapter 4, they're being persecuted and told to be quiet. It appears the movement could be squashed by powerful authorities before it even begins. So they gather to pray for boldness. In the face of opposition, let's pray for boldness until God sends His Spirit powerfully to enable them to continue to preach God's Word. Chapter 6, they pray when they are commissioning the first deacons to kingdom work with the poor.

[11:58] Chapter 8, when the gospel spreads to the Samaritans, Peter and John make a special trip to hold a conference. No. To teach them theology. No.

To pray for them and the Holy Spirit to lead them. Chapter 9, when their beloved Dorcas dies, Peter prays and she is restored to life.

Chapter 10 tells of this glorious breakthrough of the gospel to the Gentiles that will explode the mission of the church where Jesus has sent them. Where? To the uttermost parts of the earth. And there's been great things happening but they haven't gone there yet and all of a sudden it does. What do you think is featured when that happens? The gospel explosion that continues to this day, when it starts, what do you think is talked about in chapter 10?

Prayer. God speaks to Cornelius as he prays. Gentile Cornelius prays continually, we're told.

[13:05] Verse 2. And his prayers ascend to God. Verse 4. And then God speaks to Peter as he prays.

Verse 9. And God tells him, don't call unclean what I have made clean. You go and tell the good news to Cornelius.

And the gospel explodes beyond Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria to the uttermost parts of the world, to the Gentiles, the nations, the mission of God is happening as people pray.

Chapter 12, though, things take a turn. Peter is imprisoned. These followers of Jesus are stirring things up and the Romans don't like it and they're about ready to be through with this.

Let's kill some of their leaders. The church's existence again seems threatened. And so what do they do? They gather, verse 5, for earnest prayer for Peter.

[14:14] It's almost like they don't know what else to do. And I love this picture, especially in chapter 12, of them praying because it's like me when I pray. Here they are gathered around there.

They're praying. They're pleading for Peter's deliverance from prison. And Peter knocks on the door and the servant goes and gets the door and comes back and says, it's Peter. And they say, shh, shh, shh.

We're praying for Peter. He's in prison. No, no, he's here. God, no, no, we're praying for Peter. He's in prison. He can't be here. No, God has answered our prayers. It is Peter.

Chapter 13, they pray when they send out missionaries. Chapter 14, they pray as they plant churches and appoint elders in town after town and the church of Jesus Christ is now spreading rapidly and they're praying picture after picture on the early church Facebook page.

They're kneeling in prayer. It's as though God is telling us something here, isn't it? Look at the power of prayer and how God works.

[15:21] He handles these situations. Southwood, prayer is the work of the church. It is the devoted commitment of those who need God desperately.

Jesus, of all people, Himself demonstrates this pattern of praying, doesn't He? Pulling away to be with His Father when no one else knows where He is. When there are important moments coming up in His ministry, we find Him alone with His Father.

When you write the history of the church of Jesus Christ and the work of God's Spirit to advance the mission of God in the world, it's covered with prayer on every page.

That's why Samuel Chadwick said, the devil laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray.

He knows that the one we pray to is stronger and crushes the gates of hell and the history of the church bears that out. can ask us simply to think this morning about that.

[16:30] Is that what the narrative of our lives and of our church would read like if someone were to write up that story for us? I didn't ask if they would cite it as being on our website.

I mean, they're not going to look at the screen to see are we a praying church. I asked, do you and do we pray? Listen, there is a lot of prayer in this church.

Many people who are more faithful in prayer than their pastor is. And I know that. But I want to push us this morning to consider why it's not what it should be.

Why almost everyone who looks at these core commitments and says, yeah, we should be about these things says, dependent and prayerful. We got a long way to go on that one.

Why is that? Can we think about that for just a minute? I'd suggest that a big part of our struggle is that we don't pray because we don't think or feel like we need to.

[17:41] That's in some ways hard to argue with, right? I mean, we do the things that we feel like we need to do. All of us runs our lives that way. The things that are really important are the things that get our attention.

You see, dependence and prayer are inextricably linked to each other. And as Derek said earlier, we're conditioned all of our lives to be not dependent but independent.

We don't need much, right? It's not one of our favorite things. We live under the delusion often that we can take care of ourselves, provide our own daily bread.

Why would we be asking God for that? I got that covered. As I've examined my own life, practically speaking, day in and day out, I tend to trust myself more than I trust God.

I don't want it to be that way. I wouldn't set out to make it that way but practically, that's what I see often in my life. I've shared with you before Paul Miller's convicting observation.

[18:52] If you are not praying, then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you need in life. You'll always be a little too tired, a little too busy, but if, like Jesus, you realize you can't do life on your own, then no matter how busy, no matter how tired you are, you will find the time to pray.

In fact, time in prayer makes you even more dependent on God because you don't have as much time to get things done. I hate that.

Nothing that removes time to get things done could possibly be a good thing. efficiency, accomplishment, achievement. It's what drives me and God says, stop.

Rest. Can I push just a little further on this? I know it's painful enough to consider not praying because we don't feel we need God, but can I ask why we don't feel that?

I hated realizing this this week, so I kind of apologize in advance for sharing it with you, but I think often we don't pray because we're not on a Christ-centered mission where we feel our need for God.

[20:22] We don't pray because we're not actually on a Christ-centered mission in our lives or as a church where we feel our need for God.

We don't believe God will sponsor our own self-serving missions. We don't talk to Him about that, but that's what we're really up to. I don't often feel the need to pray if my greatest goal for the day is checking off my to-do list, my priorities, making a buck, pursuing my comfort, building my reputation.

I don't usually pray about those things. If you were here last Sunday, you've seen this wheel with self at the center of it.

This way our lives often function where that's what it's really about is me and everything else is here to serve that end. If that's what I'm up to, I don't need to pray until I need just a little extra help in some of the hard spots like the test is really hard or the presentation is hard or the relationship is hard and I'm frustrated and it's not allowing me to achieve my mission of a successful self and feel the way I want to about me and so I better pray.

And so sometimes prayer gets sprinkled in and that's often my experience. Help me out of this tight spot. But if my mission is truly the glory of Jesus and His mission of restoration in this world, I

promise you I feel the need to pray real quickly.

[ 22 : 01 ] When that's what I want to see my day or my life be about, think about it for a minute. If my goal is reflecting the glory of God by loving my neighbor as myself and I see my selfishness leading me to hurt even my wife, the one person I picked to love out of all the neighbors I'm supposed to love, then help.

I need God for this. If I can't speak of Jesus at work without repercussions and I'm surrounded by people who are desperate for the hope of the gospel, I better pray.

If some of my neighbors are impacted by unjust systems that might relocate some of their section 8 housing without asking for their input in a way that would negatively affect them and the whole system needs to be transformed by the gospel, I need God's help.

If I'm hearing the call to shape my life outwardly towards others but my grief or my depression or my anxiety is just debilitating, I need God.

If I'm working and focused on unity in my city but I'm encountering infighting within my own church and competition among other churches and I can't fix it, then I better pray.

[ 23 : 24 ] If I'm longing for my atheist neighbor to see the glory of Jesus and His intellectual sharpness simply surpasses mine, I realize I'm dependent upon God in prayer.

See, I know we're praying and I know God's working because those are just conversations I've had this week with some of you.

That's what drives us to prayer, isn't it? Don't you need God for those in a hundred other situations like them? Maybe as you start shaping your life around God's mission and His glory, you'll find yourself more dependent and more prayerful.

Maybe as you pray more, you'll find yourself strangely drawn towards God's mission and God's glory and having a vision for what that could look like in your life.

God loves to do that for His children. Did you know that? As you look to Him, He loves working that way in our hearts. Just think about what a painful experience it is for a parent to watch a child neglect their input, go out on their own, deny their need for a parent to their own harm.

[ 24 : 42 ] It hurts, doesn't it? It hurts when they're two years old and they insist on letting go of your hand and run off and scrape their knee on a rock. It hurts when they're 22 and you refuse to heed wise counsel and fall into bigger trouble.

But even in the midst of that painful reality, when the child then sees his need for help, does the parent laugh at the crying two-year-old?

Ha! Served you right! Letting go of my hand! Hope it hurts! You ignore the call from the police station, tearfully crying, somebody help me!

No. You pick your child up off the ground or from the police station. You might think God would ignore you after all your self-reliance and refusal to come and dependence upon Him and prayer and He never hears from you, but He won't.

In fact, Deuteronomy 8 tells us God sometimes makes His people hungry so that He can feed them. so that He can remind us that what we really need is Him.

[ 26 : 00 ] So far from putting us off, over and over again, our Father invites us to prayer. This last point is really short, but it's really important.

I want you to know what your Father says. Listen to a few invitations God gives in His Word to His struggling children. He says, Abide in Me. Ask Me for what you need and you will bear much fruit. He says, Come to Me when you're weary and burdened and you will find rest. He says, Call upon Me and I will always be near.

He says, Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you and you will glorify Me. He says, Ask, Seek, Knock, and I will answer.

Jesus says, in the Lord's Prayer that we prayed together earlier, You call My Father Your Father. And then watch and see and learn what a gracious and generous Father He is.

[ 27 : 14 ] That's the invitation to us and the promise of finding our Father all sufficient. Over and over again to rebellious, self-reliant people, God says, Climb up here in My arms.

Tell Me about it. I want to talk with you. What a glorious relationship we have because Jesus has lived and died to make us sons and daughters of God.

We say our relationship with God is one where we remain desperately needy and He remains gloriously sufficient. We repent and He forgives.

We depend and He provides. Prayer is weak people prevailing upon a strong Father. That's what it is for us.

Prevailing upon Him to do mighty things in and through and in spite of us. Are you willing to be weak this morning? To find your Father strong?

[ 28 : 26 ] He loves to do great things to show Himself glorious as we see our need for Him and look to Him and He's inviting all of us back to Him into His strong arms today.

Here's the picture I want to leave us with. One of my favorite things about being a dad was when my little baby would curl up on my chest and sleep.

I could lie like that for hours. I just loved it except now my girls are all a little bit older than that.

Mostly past that stage.

They think they're big girls who can usually handle life except when they get sick enough. Seen that before?

When they're sad enough needy enough to ask to be held and curl up in my arms. A little bit bigger but they just want to be held right there.

[ 29 : 28 ] Listen I am far from a perfectly loving Father. I've never said no to that. Not once. Yeah. Yeah come here. Come here.

Let me hold you. Let me remind you how much I love you. Experience my love and comfort again. I never say you're not my child because you haven't been in my arms recently often enough.

No. Neither does our Heavenly Father. We're His children not because we've been there praying recently enough but because in love He sent His Son for us.

So when I say come here and rest and let me care for you and experience my love again I'm not happy they're sick for sure but I am happy they're in my arms.

Our Heavenly Father doesn't enjoy our pain our emptiness our desperation but He does enjoy us leaning on Him.

[ 30 : 37 ] I want us to do that together this morning. We pray a lot when we come to church. One of the things we don't do particularly often together is kneel in prayer.

it reminds us tangibly and physically in some ways of that posture of dependence on leaning on God together.

Some of you may not be able to do that. I understand that's just fine. You can bow right where you are. Some of you may be able to but you're going to need to move to the aisles where there's carpet instead of wood and I get that too.

Feel free to do that. But I want us who are able to kneel together this morning we're going to pray a prayer on the screen together and then spend some time privately praying and meditating upon God's Word before I close us in prayer.

Would you kneel with me as we pray? Join me in prayer.

[ 31 : 37 ] O God of grace, the world is before us this day and we are weak and fearful but we look to you for strength.

If we venture forth alone we stumble and fall but on the beloved's arms we are firm as the eternal hills.

we believe you accept your word submit to your will rely on your promises trust your providence.

We have cast our anchor in the port of peace knowing that present and future are in nail pierced hands. We yield to your sovereignty all that we are and have do with us as you will.

For more information visit us online at southwood.org or by consequen I use a setting I use as you will as you will as you will as you will as you will assist with us and we will see you by following follow our new service and we will 6 will work in the service and the first are lookedish and■■■ coupe