

“Spend Time in Intense, Positive Prayer for Christ’s Church”

Matthew 7:7-12 & James 5:16-18

6/8/25

The first powerful experience with prayer that demonstrated that Christ’s Holy Spirit connects us was way back in 2005. When I studied at Pitt, I participated in America Reads program at the Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church on the North Shore of Pittsburgh which was an after-school reading program. There I met a wonderful pastor by the name of Rev. Thompson.

There I was in 2005 in a dilemma. I served Rev. Thompson and the children of the North Shore for two years (’02/03 & ’03/04). I prayed to the Lord a specific prayer, “Lord, if you want me to do this, please have someone from my past give me a call.” Within a week, Rev. Thompson gave me a call and said, “Curtis Paul, how is your soul? I was praying the other day, and the Lord told me to give you a call. What’s on your mind?” I immediately began to hear God’s voice. When we pray for each other Christ’s Spirit connects us.

This summer we are discussing spiritual formation. We are not alone in this process. Jesus desires to live and work through us by His Holy Spirit. Jesus is teaching us how to live well and how to overcome evil. We can attempt this individually, but we will be more effective when work together.

God’s Word teaches in both Matthew and James to spend time in intense, positive prayer for Christ’s Church. Prayer is vital for spiritual formation. It is the foundation for our friendship with God. God invites us to pray.

When we pray, prayer is always answered. There are three answers: yes, no, or wait. Rev. Thompson called me about a week later and the answer was “No.” Even though the answer was “No” it was a powerful demonstration of how we are connected by prayer.

As James reminds us of Elijah, prayer can take years. If we pray the way Jesus teaches, the answer will always be “Yes.” If you don’t have a prayer life begin with the Lord’s prayer. If you are teaching your children or a friend to pray, begin with the Lord’s prayer. Let’s break it down before we read the next scriptures. Jesus begins with “Our Father...” not “My Father...” Even when praying, Jesus teaches that we are not alone and not to simply think of ourselves. Prayer connects us deeply. “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” “Give us this day our daily bread.” Harkening back to Israel in the wilderness and God providing manna. “Forgive us debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Someone the other week asked, “Why debtors, and not sinners or trespassers?” The Greek word we translate is a money word. Jesus talks about money more than any other person in the Bible. If you have ever been in financial debt, it is suffocating, debilitating, creates vulnerability. Jesus is not only teaching us to forgive those who have hurt us but to literally forgive financial debts. Deliver us from evil and lead us not into temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:10, Philippians 2:14; Ephesians 4:1-3

Hope and I have had a challenging few weeks. We are not sleeping. I haven't had a full night's sleep in weeks. But that's not to say that the time has been unproductive. It has been in worry, but I try to practice what I preach. As I lay there, I begin to pray for you. God's Word is teaching us in 1 Corinthians 10:10 to not complain out loud, especially about the stuff we can't control like other people, but I don't know about you, sometimes the complaining is in my own head as I lay there awake in bed. And that's what I try to eliminate with positive words, positive prayers especially for the people in my life who are the ones keeping me up at night. Don't practice the negative stuff. Replace negative thoughts with positive prayer.

BBC Global news podcast this week had a few people debate whether Israel is committing genocide. My conclusion is, "If you are debating whether a nation is committing genocide, it's way too close to genocide. But what can we do from here? Pray and stay curious. Pray for the leaders of Israel and pray for the leaders of Palestine. And when it comes up in conversation, stay curious. Talking about world issues and politics is important; however, the person that you're having conversation with is more important than the conversation itself. Stay relational. Stay curious. Pray. God's Word teaches to do everything without complaining or arguing over unsolvable stuff.

Instead, God's Word teaches to say what is helpful for building each other up according to their needs.

Finally, to work on spiritual maturity which is Jesus' way to live well and to overcome evil, be positive. When I say, "Be positive" this is not to escape reality, this is not to overlook the hard stuff. Jesus knows life is messy. Jesus knows it's not easy being human. Practicing the faith of Jesus is bringing Jesus' Way into everyday life. Jesus is showing us the Way to experience joy amid pain and suffering.

This Jesus' stuff is serious. This Jesus' stuff takes commitment. This Jesus stuff needs you to overcome evil. Do you want to build Heaven on earth? Do you want to continue Jesus' ministry? Do you want to live well? Do you want to overcome evil? If your answer is "Yes" to any of those questions, Jesus invites you to follow Him. Jesus invites you this very moment to invite Him to be your only Way, to be your Lord and Savior.

This is how I stay positive. We experience anxiety when the future is unclear. With Jesus the future is clear. Positive prayer asks God to lead the Church in reaching the lost, to nurture believers in the faith of Jesus, and to uphold the Church's reputation in the community, all of which glorify God.

On the birthday of Christ's Church, Jesus' call to action is to pray for God to lead the Church in reaching the lost, to nurture believers in the faith of Jesus, and to uphold the Church's reputation in the community, all of which glorify God.

Love, Pastor Curtis

