

Praying with Fire

CHANGE YOUR WORLD
WITH THE POWERFUL
PRAYERS OF THE
APOSTLES

JEFF DOLES

Praying With Fire

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Published by
WALKING BAREFOOT MINISTRIES
P.O. Box 1062, Seffner, FL 33583

ISBN: 978-0-9744748-6-1

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INTRODUCTION

For the Christian who desires to enter into a dynamic and powerful life of prayer, the Bible is loaded with teachings and models. The Lord's Prayer is probably the most well-known example, given directly from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ as a pattern of prayer for His disciples. After that, the book of Psalms, prayer book and hymnal of the Old Testament, dominates the history and practice of prayer in the Church. There is another group of prayers, though, that is being recognized and restored in the worship and intercession movements of the new millennium. These are the powerful prayers offered up by the New Testament apostles.

Apostles are pioneers. They go before and pave the way. They break the ground, sow the seeds and lay the foundations for new churches, ministries and outreaches. They strategize for growth, build up believers, establish congregations and train leaders. Jim Goll identifies an apostle as "one called and sent by Christ to have the spiritual authority, character, gifts and abilities to reach and establish people in Kingdom truth and order, especially through founding and overseeing local churches."¹

The word "apostle" comes from the Greek *apostolos*, and means "one sent forth." Apostles do not go out on their own but are sent forth by the Lord Jesus Christ with full authority to speak and act on His behalf:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.
(Matthew 28:18-20)

The Apostle Paul gives us a very brief description of apostolic ministry in his letter to the Corinthians: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Corinthians 3:6). Here we find three aspects of apostolic ministry: planting, watering and growth. Apostles are responsible for planting and watering; God is responsible for making it grow.

Praying as an Apostolic People

We are not all called to be apostles, but we *are* called to be apostolic people. The mandate of the Great Commission is upon us just as much as it is upon them. Apostles cannot do this work by themselves. In fact, they are given by the Lord Jesus Christ to the Church in order to equip *us* for the work of the ministry.

It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

This is often called the “five-fold ministry.” The express purpose is to equip and prepare the people of God for the work of the ministry. The result is that the body of Christ is built up until we all come to unity in the faith and full maturity in Christ. Apostolic people, equipped for service by the five-fold ministry, help establish the work of God in others.

Learning to Pray with Apostolic Power

The apostles of the New Testament pioneered many different prayers for us, as we discover in their epistles. I have sorted these into five main groups: evangelistic, pastoral, benediction, thanksgiving and doxology. These are powerful prayers because they express, not only the heart of the apostles, but the heart of God. They show His desire to light the world with the Gospel, bless and strengthen His people and bring them to completeness in Christ.

- ❖ *Evangelistic prayers* are ground-breaking prayers. They prepare the fields, and the laborers, for sowing the Gospel and laying the foundations of local Christian fellowships.
- ❖ *Pastoral prayers* are watering prayers. They help establish Christians in the faith, both as individuals and as congregations, to grow in grace and in intimate relationship with God, and become a servant community in partnership with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ❖ *Benedictions* are also watering prayers, pouring forth with the authority of heaven to bless and minister the promises of God to His people.
- ❖ *Prayers of thanksgiving* return praise to the “Lord of the Harvest” for what He is doing in and through His people.
- ❖ *Doxologies* are prayers that declare the praiseworthiness of God and give Him glory. The apostolic purpose is all about God from beginning to end, for He is both the One who sends and the One who gives the increase. Therefore, He deserves all praise and honor.

These prayers flow easily from the pens of the apostles, often spontaneously and with great passion. They come out of an intimate relationship with the Father and a constant reliance upon the Holy Spirit. The result

is that the apostles turned their world upside down (or right side up!) in the name of Jesus.

How to Use these Prayers

These are prayers to learn by heart. By that I do not mean that you should simply memorize them, although that can certainly be helpful. Memorization is learning them by your mind. Learning them by heart means to meditate upon them and begin praying them out for yourself, for your church, for your pastor, and for anyone else who needs a work of God in their life. In this way, these prayers will become a guide for you and a springboard that launches you out into a prayer experience that is joyful and effective. To help you in this process, I have included a little commentary for each prayer, followed by some “action points” you can do.

When you begin praying, don't be in a hurry. Take your time and pray slowly. As you do, you may find that you feel an inward desire to expand upon some particular point. That is the Holy Spirit prompting you and if you listen carefully, He will give you words to pray back to the Father. Go with this as far as the Spirit leads you. When you come to the end, sit quietly and contemplate what the Spirit has given you. Then take up your prayer again, remaining sensitive to what the Lord is showing you. At the end of your prayer time, give thanks to the Lord for what He has done. Then go out in peace, enjoying His presence.

NOTES

¹Jim Goll, *Kneeling on the Promises* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1999) p. 301.

PRAYING WITH APOSTOLIC PASSION

For the apostles, prayer was not just a means of ministry but a way of life. It was not just about performing a duty but walking daily in a relationship, a loving partnership with God. This kind of prayer life requires a heart that is perfected in love, a habit of devotion, a deep confidence in God and His Word and a reliance upon the Holy Spirit. These are the principles of apostolic prayer as taught by the apostles themselves.

Preparing Your Heart for Prayer

Prayer is a matter of the heart. For your prayer to be effective, your heart must be prepared, particularly in regard to love. There is a tried and true saying that “Prayer is the key to heaven but faith unlocks the door.” However, we need to go one step further and understand, with Paul, that “faith expresses itself through love” (Galatians 5:6). This is especially true regarding prayer and includes both love for God and love for others. James makes the same point, but in terms of desires and motives:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because

you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:1-3)

Prayer that is full of love for others will not cause fights and quarrels because it does not covet. Prayer that is full of love for God will not seek to please itself but God. Part of the problem of unanswered prayer is that we do not ask, but asking out of selfish desires and motives can also keep us from receiving because we are missing the most important ingredient—love!

Peter put it this way, specifically in the context of the marriage relationship:

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (1 Peter 3:7)

Lack of love, consideration and respect in our relationships can actually *hinder* our prayers, keeping them from being answered. The solution is found in the love of God—it must be perfected, or made complete in us. We come to this completion by obeying God and loving one another. “If anyone obeys His Word, God’s love is truly made complete in him” (1 John 2:5). “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:12).

When the love of God is perfected in us, our prayers will be effective and powerful for they will be all about Him and not about us. Our prayers will arise out of love, and God will not deny that which He has perfected in us ...

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