

“WITH ONE ACCORD”

Acts 1:12–26

Key Verse: 1:14

“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”

Do you like to be with people, or would you prefer to be alone? It may seem like a personality trait: some people are shy and introverted, whereas others are naturally gregarious. In today’s passage we see how the first followers of Jesus all gathered together to pray, even though nobody told them to. Why were they doing this? Was it really necessary? What does it mean? And why do we need to follow their example? May God speak to us through his word today.

Jesus has just told his apostles to stay in Jerusalem, where his enemies are, and wait for the promised Holy Spirit, who would empower them to be his witnesses to the end of the earth. After he said that, he ascended into heaven. It was spectacular. But now, these men are suddenly on their own. Surely, there’s a lot going on inside them. They’ve got to be scared, confused, and battling feelings of failure. But their great point is that they listen to Jesus and try to do what he said. Like them, there are times when we all feel disillusioned or lost. But that’s the time to come back to the Bible, meditate on his word, and try to follow it. Though it may seem like there’s no way, we can find our way in his words.

Look at verse 13. They were the eleven disciples of Jesus, minus Judas Iscariot, who we’ll see more about later. These men had been with Jesus all along. They followed him everywhere, listening to, learning from, and helping him. Each one had his own unique character. Peter was outspoken, James and John were secretly ambitious, Andrew was helpful, Philip calculated, Thomas doubted, Bartholomew was just there, Matthew was quietly trying to put himself back together after his sinful life, Simon the Zealot was trying to control his fury over all the social injustice. Over their intense years of life together, surely they had conflict between them. We know that twice, an argument broke out about which of them was considered the greatest (Luke 9:46; 22:24). But after Jesus suffered, died and was raised, and after all of them had failed him, things were

different. Their dream of an earthly kingdom through Jesus had been shattered. No one was sure of his own righteousness anymore, not even Peter. They'd all become keenly aware of their own weakness and need. They all realized they were facing the same opposition. And they'd all been given the same command, to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit.

So they return to Jerusalem and head to the upper room, where they were staying (12a,13a). And what do they do there? Bolt the door and take a nap? No. Look at verse 14. It's written in understatement, but this is remarkable. Frankly, the disciples had not been praying men. Right before his arrest, when Jesus asked them to pray, they slept (Luke 22:45–46). They didn't seem like men who would voluntarily join a prayer meeting with women. But to our surprise, here they are, praying with the women who'd been following Jesus from Galilee, and with his mother Mary and his brothers. Nobody tells them to; it just happens. Why? They all realize they're helpless. They all need each other.

And it wasn't just a one-time prayer meeting. Verse 14 says they "were devoting themselves to prayer." For how long? Jesus had been crucified on the day of Passover and rose on the third day. Verse 3 says he spent the next forty days speaking to them about the kingdom of God. And the day of Pentecost was exactly fifty days after Passover. So, all together, their time of united prayer was a little less than ten days. But the verb tense "they were devoting" means they were meeting regularly during that time, most likely every day.

This Greek word for "devote" is a beautiful one. It means "to associate closely, constantly, and persistently," like a fully dedicated, loyal soldier (10:7). Some people are not devoted to anything. But it's beautiful to be devoted to a Christian community, and especially to praying there. In 2:42, Luke describes the many new believers who'd joined the followers of Jesus: "And they *devoted* themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2:42). In 2:46, Luke again uses this Greek word "devoting."¹ In fact, in Greek, it's the same two words, in the same order, as here in 1:14: "*devoting with one accord.*" Luke is stressing not personal devotion, but devotion with other believers. He uses the word "devotion" once more, when the apostles

¹ Many English Bible versions translate this word in Acts 2:46 as new believers "continuing" or who "continued" to attend the temple and eat together.

decide not to get distracted by the daily distribution of food. They say, “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word” (6:4).

Amidst life’s many distractions and demands, we need a real decision and a firm commitment to devote ourselves to pray together. Colossians 4:2 says, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful and thankful.” Literally it says, “Be devoted to prayer!” Such devotion is part of our spiritual warfare. Apostle Paul writes, “...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...” (Eph.6:18). Here, “all perseverance” is literally “all devotion.”

Most of all, verse 14 says that they’re praying “with one accord.” In English, our word “accord” means “one in mind and heart.” But the Greek word literally means “to rush along in unison.” It can be used to describe musicians who play quite different sounding instruments, with different notes. But when they play together, with the same tempo, they create a beautiful, harmonic sound that’s not possible to achieve alone. Luke uses this unusual word ten times in Acts. Sometimes, he’s describing crowds in general, who are united to persecute believers.² Other times, Luke is describing believers’ unity.³ It doesn’t happen easily; through humble communication we can come to one accord (15:25). And this phrase “with one accord” is the trademark of the first Christian church. As their numbers grow, this beautiful unity spreads through them. To be one with a big group of diverse people may seem too daunting. So it’s good to start small. Once Jesus said, “...if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matt.18:19–20). Peter and John, former rivals, eventually become close coworkers as leaders of the Jerusalem church.⁴ So we need to pray for our church leaders. Married couples also need to pray to be of one accord. In these ways we build an environment of spiritual unity.

In this diverse group, surprisingly none of them is judging or criticizing the others. They all have the same passion. They all want to do what Jesus said. They all want to be his witnesses. They’re all fervently asking for the promised Holy Spirit. Their unity doesn’t mean they’ve lost their individuality. We can have

² Acts 7:57; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29.

³ Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25.

⁴ Acts 3:1,3,4,11; 4:13,19; 8:14.

such spiritual unity when we share the common ground to obey Jesus, to be his witnesses, and to depend on the Holy Spirit. Praying for common prayer topics is also helpful. In Chicago UBF we're praying that God may raise spiritual leaders for the world and for future generations through us. How important it is to pray, not against each other, but with one accord, with and for each other, and based on Jesus' prayer topics. We need to remember: "with one accord" is the opposite of stirring up division. Apostle Paul taught: "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him" (Titus 3:10). Unity among believers is serious before God; we all need to work at it.

But for individualistic people struggling with attention issues, this is a totally new way of life: daily devotion to prayer with others, with one mind and heart. Some may think, "I just can't; that's not for me." But in light of today's passage, devotion to prayer with one accord is necessary for all believers. Apostle Paul says that when we're united with Christ, we receive his encouragement, his love, his Spirit, his affection and sympathy, and then we can have the same love, "being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil.2:1-2). Paul also says we all have a common Christian calling, to walk "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph.4:1-3). So having this "one accord" is possible for all of us in Jesus, especially as we learn to encourage each other (Heb.10:25).

The apostles, the women, and Jesus' family are all so different. But together, they're praying and preparing themselves for the task Jesus has given them. To be clear: devoting themselves to prayer with one accord is not their way of creating group pressure and forcing God to act. They're just preparing themselves to be ready for God to work through them. This kind of humble prayer is called "waiting on the Lord." Instead of talking too much or trying to do many things, they come together and wait on the Lord in prayer. Helping each person become more devoted to praying with one accord with everyone else is the best way for us to get ready for the Holy Spirit's coming.

And there's one more point here: Throughout his writings Luke highlights that through prayer, God gives us the Spirit.⁵ So, we should humbly listen to what the Bible is saying. Instead of asking many things with our own ideas, we should

⁵ Luke 3:21-22; 11:13.

be asking God to give us his Spirit to think and pray and do what he wants. If we skip asking for the Holy Spirit, we're missing the most vital aspect of prayer.

In verses 15–26 we see how God inspires Peter as the leader of this community of 120. Through devoted prayer, God helps him see the problem among them: their vessel as Jesus' witnesses has been broken through the betrayal and death of Judas Iscariot. Peter helps them see this event not humanly, but in light of Scripture. He also guides them to find a suitable replacement. They don't argue about it or allow for a political campaign: they find a way to let God decide, through prayer. Then everyone accepts the outcome, and their vessel is restored. Only after this are they spiritually ready for the coming of the Holy Spirit. It tells us how important each leader joining in unity is.

Let's read our key verse, verse 14, again. "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." May God help us to be devoting ourselves to prayer with one accord, so that he can form us into a vessel ready for the Holy Spirit to do his mighty work.