

Session 6

PRESENCE OF PRAYER

Acts 1:1-11

Memory Verse

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

– ACTS 1:8, CSB




Presence of Prayer

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Jesus's final words to His followers instructed them to wait for the Father's promise that they would receive power through the Holy Spirit.

CALL TO ACTION: We form prayer covenants committed to prayer in our homes, groups, and churches for specific kingdom impact. Our series culminates with a night of worship and prayer.

Just a few weeks ago, we turned the calendar to a new year and many people made New Year's resolutions. Think about the most common resolutions you make or hear about people making. One of the more popular goals is to grow stronger or more physically fit. While wanting to be fit or even physically strong isn't wrong, believing we only need our own strength and power is wrong. The world encourages us to find power within ourselves, but today we are studying what Jesus said about this subject. This will help us be clear about where to find power and how to position ourselves to be used by the Lord.

 Where are you prone to rely on your own strength over God's strength?

 What happens when we don't trust God's strength over our own?

Session Summary

The early church was on the edge of a new era. Just before Jesus's ascension to heaven, He gave final instructions and made a promise to send power for His followers. As they waited in Jerusalem, the disciples spent time together in prayer. This positioned them to receive the Father's promise of the Holy Spirit.

For us to fulfill the call of God in our lives, we must commit to prayer and seeking to live our lives surrendered to the power of the Holy Spirit, just as we see those first Christians doing. When we call out to the Lord and rely on the Holy Spirit's power, we will be used in the work of the kingdom of God here on earth.

1. Last Moments (Acts 1:1-3)

Luke wrote Acts as a follow up to his account of Jesus's ministry in the gospel of Luke. This ministry continued into the early church and continues in the church today. While Acts doesn't cover all the events of the early church, it does give much detail about how the gospel grew from Jerusalem to Rome. One of the main themes of this book is the power the church received through the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 ushered in a new era for the early believers. We are just as needy for this power today, and we can look to this account of the early church as we call on the Lord to use us as He used the church in Acts.

Knowing His time with His followers was short, Jesus intentionally sowed valuable teaching into His last moments with them. Jesus also lived out His teaching as an example. He demonstrated what it means to trust and rely on the Holy Spirit for power every day. Key to Jesus's perfect life on earth was His perfect dependence on the Spirit. If this was how Jesus lived, how much more should we rely on the power of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives?

 What are some ways Jesus showed His reliance on the Holy Spirit throughout His life?

Through the Scriptures, we learn of God's Spirit moving and acting among His people. Yet, in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit did not dwell among God's people to the same degree as Jesus promised these early followers. Following Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension, He would send the Spirit to be with His people forever. This reality began at Pentecost and will continue with the church throughout history.



Look back at Jesus's words in John 14:15-26; 16:1-15 regarding the Holy Spirit. How would the ministry of the Spirit change the lives of Jesus's followers?

Jesus knew the magnitude of the mission He gave His followers. If they were going to obey His commands, they were going to need power and help from outside themselves. This power comes from the Holy Spirit. To carry out the mission of God in our lives and in our church, we must follow the example of Jesus and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

This concept is countercultural in a time when we are bombarded with messages that tell us the opposite. Self-reliance is celebrated with false ideas that assure people they can do anything, be anything, and achieve anything—if they just tap into the power already inside them. This way of living and thinking goes against the way of Jesus.



Application: Where do you need to trust the Holy Spirit's power instead of your own strength right now?

2. Wait for the Promise (Acts 1:4)

Jesus concluded His final instructions with the reminder to wait for the Father's promise. Following this instruction may have been more difficult than we perceive. These Christ followers were in the place where Jesus had been killed, and they were supposed to stay there and wait.

Whatever emotions they felt, being told to wait was likely not what they were hoping for. When you realize you are on the edge of something new, you typically want to get going, so being told to wait can feel impossible. But when the Lord directs us to wait, it is the best thing we can do. Obeying the Lord is always worth it. Even when waiting is hard, it is best to obey Him.


? What are some ways waiting often feels like a “waste”? How can we be sure that our moments of waiting are never a waste?

We will accomplish nothing for the kingdom of God if we are not willing to wait for the Holy Spirit to empower and guide us. Despite the many things they had seen and even done alongside Jesus, these early followers were reminded that the power they needed had to come from Him. The same is true for us. We must resist being caught up in our own plans or agendas and look to Christ for direction and power daily, even when it means waiting for an unknown period.

? Where is it hardest for you to wait on God right now? How can you seek to trust Him as you do?


Waiting can stir up anxiety, but it also can bring about excitement and anticipation. Think about things that you eagerly wait for: Christmas, a baby to arrive, an exciting game, a concert, or even a package delivery. You happily wait for things that are valuable to you because you know it is worth it in the end. Nothing will fulfill our longing like the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. He is worth waiting on because He won't ever let you down.

God knows what you need and often uses waiting as an opportunity to grow your faith. You learn to trust what God wants to do in you as much as what He wants to do through you. He may call you to wait as a preparation for something coming in your life. Instead of complaining about the wait, like the disciples, we can look to what God is doing to prepare us for the next part of His plan. God always keeps His promises, and we can count on that. Every promise of God is good and trustworthy.

 Application: How might God be using your current waiting to prepare you for something to come?


3. The Power (Acts 1:5-11)

Jesus told His followers they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Consider what you know about baptism. It is the immersion of a person in water symbolizing new life in Christ. To be baptized in the Spirit means we need to be completely immersed in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not to be an add on in our lives but our guide for all of life.


 What threatens to take your focus off seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

In these final moments, the disciples asked Jesus a common question they had asked throughout His ministry. Was now the time He would restore the kingdom to Israel? Yet again, Jesus did not answer as the disciples expected and likely hoped. He encouraged them to keep trusting and not worry about knowing all the answers.

God the Father has established a timeline for the world that is His to know and control. Although we get caught up trying to figure things out or know all the details of the future, it is better to trust that God holds it all together, no matter what we know or don't. Relying on Him completely as you continue living in the power of the Spirit brings freedom and security. Our call is the same as it was for these first followers: to seek that same filling and anointing so we also can be used in mighty ways for the Kingdom.

 How might knowing lies ahead actually hinder our reliance on God and His timing?

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would bring power. What is this power for? This is not power meant to bring glory to any of Jesus's followers but to continually point back to the truth about Him. All Christians have been given the task of being Jesus's witnesses in all the world. The power for this mission comes from the Holy Spirit. By His power, we live as witnesses and others see the difference He makes in our lives.

 Application: How might you seek to point others to Jesus through the Holy Spirit's work in your life?

Conclusion

At the end of Jesus's time on earth following the resurrection, He was with His disciples. In those final moments, Jesus gave some last instructions and a powerful promise. He told them to wait for the Holy Spirit to come. Only through the power of the Spirit can we do what God commands.

Instead of trying to live on our own strength, we surrender to the Spirit. When we do, we will be empowered to live in such a way that we are effective witnesses for the Lord. We are all witnesses for something. The question is who or what will you be a witness for?

In response, the early believers waiting and prayed together. Through the posture of prayer, they positioned themselves to receive what God had for them. Likewise, if we want to be used by the Lord in meaningful ways, then we also need to position ourselves through prayer as we seek to surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us.



What are some ways you can wait with intention this week?



How can we encourage one another to rely on the Holy Spirit and not ourselves each day?



Who is the Spirit leading you to pursue in gospel conversation? How will you move toward this?

Memorize

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

- Acts 1:8, CSB