

We Prayed, He Answered
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Wasilla Bible Church
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I want to extend another word of welcome, especially to the kids. This is...we decided to do these two services this way, and last week I just loved it, hearing the little kids wiggling, talking...I love it! Brought back a lot of memories. We are gonna go forward, and I'm gonna encourage you parents—relax with that. I know you're not always used to having the kids with you, at the nursery and stuff. But be comfortable with that. We've all been there. If your kids are wiggly and all that, we've all been there. But we're gonna do two things, the next two things in the service that are a little bit different, and the first I need to introduce. It'll be a set of videos, and I need to make a few comments before we actually watch 'em.

The Scriptures call us to be a people who are salt and light in this world, a people who give witness to the reality of Jesus in the way we walk, in the way we speak, and the way we live. That calling was really pressed upon us in the spring of 2009 by a working of God's Spirit within us, and we just felt called by God to be very focused and deliberate about what we are doing individually and congregationally by way of witness. And we responded to that stirring of God's Spirit within us with a prayer, a simple prayer modeled after a prayer found in Scripture, a prayer that we took and put to music and decided we would pray for a thousand days. We didn't have a program to start; we had no campaign to launch; we had no classes to teach; we had no pamphlets to hand out. All we had was a prayer, and with that prayer a commitment to pray it deliberately and diligently until it became a part of us.

Yesterday, December 31st, was the thousandth...day one thousand. And whenever you hit a milestone like that there's stories to tell. And when you've been that focused on a project there's questions raised. And even beyond that, there's lessons to be learned. And most importantly, there's a God to be heard. See, we were very deliberate and God-ward when we moved into this process. We spent months as an elder board praying that through and deciding about this. And we wanna be just as deliberate and just as diligent about being God-ward as we close the project. And so, over the weeks ahead, we're gonna tell those stories, we're gonna answer some of the questions raised, we are going to look for some of the lessons to be learned, and most importantly we're going to try to gain God's perspective, to hear Him with respect to the past thousand days.

Today we're gonna start with three short stories from the congregation from the past thousand days. The first one is kind of a template. It's kind of a pattern that we saw a number of times—an individual would hear us singing this song at the end of a service, and then they would pick it up and make it their prayer...and God would answer. We would ask, He would answer. And He would answer in a variety of circumstances that would be very different from one another, but He would answer. And we would find ourselves in situations with a confidence, an openness, to speak about Jesus—not to press, strong-arm, for conversion, [but] simply to be open about His reality in our lives. And this first example fits that pattern.

Speaker 1: A few months into this prayer project I heard some testimony from Willie Shelton about how he had been praying this prayer, and I guess I...he made me realize that it was a prayer. Initially I thought this was just kind of a song we were singing at church. And I guess God touched my heart and said, “Yeah, you know, this is something I want you to pray earnestly, from your heart.” And I remember driving into work the next morning, it was a Monday, and I was kinda hesitant to actually pray this earnestly because, well, God usually answers if you ask Him. And so I remember about five minutes before I got to work I prayed this prayer. And I showed up at work and I walked inside and I opened the door of my office and left it open and sat down. And almost immediately there was a couple of gentlemen that work there...they just walk into my office and sat down and started talking about football...which was kind of unusual. Like I said, I don't have a whole lot of communication with them, and football seemed to suddenly shift the conversation from talking about sports to talking about God, which was kind of unusual. I went home that night feeling “Wow, that was great!” An opportunity to share, and I felt pretty good about that whole thing.

So the next day I was driving into work and I said, “Ah, hey, you know, it worked out pretty good. Let's go ahead and pray this prayer again.” And within minutes I showed up to open up my door, and one of the folks that works on our computers was sitting there working on my computer. And she was on her phone having a very belligerent conversation with someone. And I thought, “My goodness, she's very upset at this individual.” And a couple minutes later she hung up the phone, cursing, and I asked her if everything was alright. And she said no, she was

very upset because a certain individual that she had in her life, a friend of hers apparently, an acquaintance, kept trying to talk to her about God. And right then I was kind of nervous because I realized that a day prior God had put a circumstance in front of me that was very different, and now this was a polar opposite circumstance. I started to witness to this gal and talk to her about God. And by the end of it she said she had to go back to her office and to drop by after lunch and pick up a cd that I needed to use. I stopped to pick up the cd, she approached me to give it to me and said that she was gonna file a grievance against me for talking to her about God at work. And so at that point I was kinda scared and I realized that 'well, might as well forge on, because I can't go back now.' So I kept witnessing, and after a while she stopped me and said that she didn't want to file a grievance, that she needed more people in her life to tell her about God. And we continue to talk about God to this day. And I'm thankful that God has put those opportunities in my life. Guess that's it.

Pastor Larry: The second one we're gonna show emphasizes the fact that in the giving of witness the prayer was answered, regardless how our words were received. And this particular video is possibly my favorite of all the ones we made...not because the person is a polished speaker—he was very afraid to be in front of that camera, and you will be able to tell that—but because years ago when I first met this person...the first time I ever talked to him he had an empty bottle and a loaded gun, and he was ready to end it all. And now he gives witness to the reality of Jesus.

Speaker 2: ...anyway, we were talkin' about helpin' others, and kinda spreadin' the word of Jesus, and I had a friend in Hawai'i who was comin' home and got sick. And he had...I forget...something to do with his blood pressure, I think, and I didn't know if he had a religion at all. But I thought maybe he was in the hospital here, at our hospital here in the Valley. So I had called a friend here at church and told him what I was planning on doing, and he gave me some verses to look at, I think Romans and Acts and a few others. So I wrote these down and I read 'em, and so I had my 'guns loaded' and I was ready to go in and see what I could do.

So I go to the hospital room and he's there, and I didn't even bring it up. I forget now how...oh, I think...I think what he said was a pastor or a minister or somebody came by and just to visit with him. And when he said that I asked him, I said, "Well, what religion are you?" And he kind of sat up a little and said, "Oh, I don't have a religion. I don't believe in it." And I said, "What do you mean? You gotta believe in something." And he goes, "Yeah, I'm agnostic." He says, "You know what that means?" And I said, "Yeah, of course I do." And he says, "You know, I took some courses in college, and it was..." he said, "I only went about half way through. And you know I had to let it go because it didn't make any sense to me. And I just don't believe in it. It's not real." And he was really getting kinda mad, and I really hadn't asked him very much. He was doing most of the talking. So he says, "I really don't want to talk about religion." And I said...or he said, "I don't wanna argue about religion." And I said, "No, no, I don't wanna do that either. That's not what I was doin'."

So I stopped, but he kept going. There was just a little pause, but he kept going. It really was kind of...I don't know the word to use, but he was puttin' me down for believin' it. He thought that...he kinda let me know that he thought I was ignorant, I guess, that I would even believe something like this, that it was all just a bunch of made-up stuff. I told him, I said, "Well, you know, I...you can believe what you wanna believe, but I've believed this, and I believe it for a reason, because I know from experience." And he said, "Well, I don't wanna talk about it." But he kept talkin' about it. And he did this until somebody else came in the room to visit him, and then the conversation did stop then. And I only stayed another few minutes, and I went home.

But it really kinda broke my heart that he would talk to me the way he did, after being such a friend for as long. And he still is. I still see him. You know, just pray for him...that's all I can do. And maybe some day he'll see something before it's too late.

Pastor Larry: Our third video has what I call a highlight ending. It's the way we would love to see every time we share about Jesus ending. Interesting one about this one, though, is not only is it a highlight ending, but it's like many of the other stories of witness I've heard as we've asked different people. It's one of those where it wasn't until afterwards that the linkage was made between that witness opportunity and the words that were given and the prayer that we've been praying. And you'll notice by the end of this video that linkage is made and it's very clear.

Speaker 3: I was talking to Larry a few weeks ago, and I was just sharing with him that I got a phone call from my niece in North Carolina, and it wasn't one of those phone calls you want to get. She was diagnosed with lung and brain cancer. And we were pretty sad. And then the next thought that came to mind is, "Lord, brain cancer? I don't know if she knows You! Please give me that opportunity to talk to her." And most of you know it's difficult to talk to

family about the Lord. And so I called the next day to talk to her, and I said, "Terry, are you by yourself?" She was in the hospital. She goes, "Well, my daughter's asleep, and my son just went downstairs." And I said, "Well, I need to talk to you about something. It's really important, it's about your spiritual life." And she goes, "Ok." And so it was going well, and I said, "Terry, I need to know if you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, if you've ever asked Him into your heart and life." And she said, "Well, I haven't for a long time." And I didn't laugh; I thought it was very sweet. And I said, "Well, given your circumstances," I said, "If you'd like to be really sure that if the Lord were to take you home that you would be going home to see Him and the rest of the family that's with the Lord," and I said, "If you'd like me to pray that Sinner's Prayer with you so you can be sure of your salvation," I said, "I would be happy to do that with you." And so she said, "Yes, Auntie, I'd like you to do that." So we prayed.

And then she was fortunate enough to have surgery, and the negative part was three weeks later the tumor grew back. And so I thought, "Ok, Lord, I was gonna wait and go in January, but I think I'm gonna go sooner and visit with her." So I took a couple devotional books. She kicked her husband out of his bedroom and said, "We're having a slumber party," and every night we read in those devotional books. And I know it blessed her because one night she said to me, "Auntie, let's go to bed now so we can read. Let's go read." So she was encouraged, and she rested easy after we read Scripture. And I just enjoyed the time with the family. It was good. And it was God working through this.

And so the day that I was leaving I was in the kitchen. It was late at night, like 1 a.m., and talking to her eldest daughter and her husband. And her daughter said...she said, "Auntie," she said, "you're like an angel that God sent to us." And I said, "Well, I don't know about an angel..." but I knew what she was trying to tell me. And she said, "You have caused me to want to be a better person. I want to do things differently, to focus on how I behave with others." And I said, "You know, that's exactly what the Lord wants us to do. He wants us to focus on our own growth and not point the finger and expect other people to do things differently. We need to make a change in our own life." And I said, "That's awesome!"

So I was home...I came home, had a fabulous visit with my family. And when I came home...about two weeks had passed, and we were singing our witness song in the morning. And the Lord just brought it clear as a bell to me that in every circumstance give us the ability to share and to witness. And I realized God had done that, and it totally blessed me. I was so excited, I told Larry after service. And you know, the cancer's still going on with my niece, but she's trusting the Lord. She has an excellent attitude. And I'm just so thankful that God used me in that particular manner. And I'm just thankful for the way God continues to bless in our lives.

Pastor Larry: I'm not sure where the Lord's gonna be taking us next in terms of the coming year and any new projects we have, any new focus or emphasis that He may call us to. It may be something to do with a specific work that He has for us. It may be just simply about our walk individually and together. It may be about our worship. I don't know. I do know this—central to it will be the reality of Jesus, just as central to everything we've done the past thousand days is the reality, the wonder, the glory, and the mystery of Jesus.

And because of that we stop the first Sunday of every year and we arrange the room like you see it now. And we put the cross at the very middle, and we take Communion together. It's an ancient tradition that Jesus Himself started the night in which He was betrayed. And He asked His disciples to remember Him in this way, by the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup. It's the way to make sure, no matter how busy we are, no matter how excited we may be about what we just finished, and what we're excited about in terms of the year ahead, or what may be coming, we stop and remember the really important thing above all, and that's Jesus—the One who died for us, whose blood was shed for us, so that God's grace can be released in our lives with out end, for all those who would believe. The passage of Scripture we read is found in 1 Corinthians 11, where the Apostle Paul is speaking to the Corinthian church, a church very excited about all the things they were doing and wanting to do and yet forgetting some of the most important things. And so the Apostle Paul calls them back to taking Communion and what it's about. And he says this:

I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and He said, "This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me [to remember Me]." In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim [you preach] the Lord's death until He comes.

Let's pray.

Our Father,

We come before You as a people who give witness by our presence here today and in the taking of Communion to our faith in the reality of Jesus. We do so, Father, with thanks for the Savior You sent, the Son You sacrificed, the Lord You have raised, the King You have exalted, and the Redeemer who will return. Father, we thank You for Him. And Father, as we remember Him in this simple tradition, in this simple act of obedience, we pray and we ask, Father, that You will bring Him to the very center of our lives...our thinking, our hearts, our homes, our congregation, and beyond. Father, quicken us with the reality of all that He is.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Congregation sings:

The Lord bless thee (the Lord bless thee)
And keep thee (and keep thee)
The Lord make His face to shine upon thee.

The Lord bless thee (the Lord bless thee)
And keep thee (and keep thee)
The Lord make His face to shine upon thee.

And be gracious unto thee,
And be gracious unto thee.

The Lord lift up (the Lord lift up)
His countenance (His countenance)
On thee and give thee peace.