

8-8-21

Sermon- Prayer as a Group

Scripture- Romans 12, Acts 2: 42-47, CTW: Ps 8

Hymns- 634, 635, 536

Theme- What things do you feel must be agreed upon when praying with others so that the group will function in unity and achieve harmony? Today we see how the people in the first church achieved that. The Book of Acts, being a record of the beginnings of the first church, is filled with examples of the amazing things that can happen when we learn to pray as a group!

I. Praying in Community/Praying with Others

I think most of us here believe prayer makes a difference not only because we believe the Bible to be true, but because we have seen the results ourselves. God does respond to his children's requests.

In fact Jesus was clear that we should have a personal prayer time, and he modeled it for us too. We talked about the Lord's Prayer last week. Jesus encouraged us to pray in seclusion as a way of focusing on our relationship with God. We need time to pray alone because it allows us to concentrate on God, to avoid distractions, and to wait upon the Lord.

A. Today we go deeper into the subject with the question: "Does it make a difference if we pray with others versus just praying by ourselves?"

For the answer to that question, we need to look in the book of Acts (the record of the first church), and see what happened when the Christians prayed together.

Lets begin with **Acts 1:14**. After Jesus' resurrection, his disciples, they [disciples] all joined constantly in prayer, along with the women including Jesus' mother Mary and his brothers. **The Result:** It was shortly afterward the Holy Spirit came powerfully on the disciples.

In **Acts 1:24**, it says that when they were faced with an important question **THEY PRAYED**.

After the disciples received the Holy Spirit, as the first Christ followers began gathering it says this in **Acts 2:42**- "They **devoted** themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to **prayer**. Prayer here was one of several things but the **result** of all of these working together was that the Lord added daily those who were being saved.

A couple of chapters later in **Acts 4:24** the Apostles Peter and John were released from prison and we read, When they [the disciples] heard this [the release of Peter and John], they raised their voices **IN ONE ACCORD** in prayer to God.

And for the next several verses it records the prayer they prayed together. What were the results of this prayer meeting? **Skip down to verse 31**. It says the place they were meeting shook, **they were filled once again** with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly.

In **Acts 12:5** we see that Peter was kept in prison, but the **church was earnestly praying to God for him**. The result? Peter was released miraculously from jail before his imminent death.

In **Acts 13:2-3** While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." **3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off**. The next chapters are the result of their first mission trip to the modern nation of Cyprus and Turkey, which was very successful.

Later when Paul was on his second missionary journey, in the city of Philippi (the letter of Philippians in the Bible was written to these people), **In Acts 16:25-26** we see that about midnight **Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them**. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken.

At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. The result was not only the earthquake, but even more importantly the jailor asked Paul what he needed to do to be saved and he and his whole family came to faith in Christ.

Why am I sending you through so many Scripture passages? Because I want to show you that the pattern we see over and over in the book of Acts is that God not only answers prayer but he particularly relishes in answering the prayers of his people gathered together.

And after reading these passages, I wonder if we experience power shortages/outages, because we don't pray with others as a group.

B. Why the difference when praying together? I can only partially answer that. Many of us are familiar with Jesus' words in **Mt. 18:20**- "for where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

But how many are familiar with the previous verse **Matthew 18:19** when Jesus said, "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven? For **where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.**"

The context is two or three believers gathering together, who are listening to God, and are in agreement with each other in prayer, and the result is that God promises to answer their request.

Or consider Jesus' brother James when he says, Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord (**James 5:14**). Why elders or leadership of the church in plural? Why not just pray at home or call up the prayer chain? It makes me wonder if we might be missing something, a blessing from God when we are not praying together.

II. How often do we pray together? To seek the Lord together? As a couple, as a family, as a small group of Christians, as a church, as a Christian community, or as a nation?

A. The power of praying together is one of the most overlooked. Yet it is one of the primary power sources of God's blessing on a nation, a community, a church, a family, a couple. One of the reasons we spend time in prayer on Sunday morning is because the church is gathered together. **So as we pray in group context hopefully we are praying in agreement together.** Jesus said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer.

The reason we have a Tuesday night prayer meeting which prays for specific concerns in our church and in our community is because we are convinced that God answers the prayers of his people gathered together.

The reason we likewise begin Bible Studies, Sunday school classes, and ministry meetings with prayer is because we believe God answers the prayers of his people **when they are collected together.**

We come to believe in Acts that spiritual growth is impossible apart from other Christians to nurture us, supports us, and spur us on toward love and good deeds through prayer. **Heb. 10:24.**

In conversations I've had with pastors of fast-growing churches, the first thing they talk about isn't the growth or outreach strategy they used, the change in worship music, or the slick marketing campaign. **The first thing they talk about is a prayer meeting.**

One pastor said his church grew from around 140 to over 350 in the 4-5 years he was there, and the first thing he would talk about was the prayer meeting of a few people in the church **who had met for years before he arrived** and the church grew.

B. So the Question of the Day is: Who are you praying with regularly? It begins with our own personal prayer time, but then we branch out and pray with others.

Are you praying with your spouse or family including your kids, a small group of Christian friends, or a church prayer meeting? I've heard the comment many times, "I don't like praying out loud, or I don't feel comfortable praying around others."

First of all nobody said you had to pray out loud when you are together, perhaps other people are more gifted or comfortable in that area.

However having said that I think it is helpful praying out loud, especially when we are together with other Christians because it allows us to be in agreement together. It helps to start praying out loud with people you trust, your spouse, your kids, a small group of people.

So if you still struggle I've got a suggestion for you, **get over it!** (I know that doesn't sound very compassionate). It doesn't have to be fancy. It doesn't even have to be long, it just needs to be from the heart.

III. Let's Look At Some Principles of Praying Together

A. Praying in Faith, Praying with Expectation

There are a couple of principles of prayer coming out of these stories in Acts today. **Number one, when we pray are we praying in faith or praying with expectation?** Are we believing God will answer? Jesus said, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer (**Mt. 21:22**)." There is an element of trust in prayer. We don't just pray thinking, "I **hope** God will answer, or "**what the heck, it can't hurt.**" That's not a prayer of faith, it is a prayer of desperation...a last minute half-court shot at the end of a basketball game.

I love this morning's look at Acts because it reminds me that even the early Christians weren't perfect with this. They just gathered to commiserate about their problems, and group prayer sprang from that. In other words, they weren't exactly praying in faith.

The lesson from this then is: When we pray do we expect God to answer, and are we looking for that answer? Or do we pray and quickly forget about it?

B. The Next Principle is Limitations of Prayer: The Answer to Prayer May not Come the Way we Expect.

While we pray in faith expecting God to answer, looking for the answer, we also need to realize that the answer to prayer may not necessarily come the way we expect.

For instance, I imagine the Christians in Jerusalem were praying for the disciple James when Herod took him into custody. **(Acts 12)** Yet, the end result was that Herod had James killed, put to death by the sword.

God did not intercede in a miraculous way for James, even though he too, like Peter, was one of Jesus' closest disciples. God's answer to their prayer was, "No." For some reason God had a different plan. We don't know why God chose one of them to be saved and allowed the other to die.

Why do we pray for one person who had an accidental head injury and he healed quickly, yet we pray for another who is still in a coma after several weeks?

We pray for one person with cancer and they live and we pray for another person with cancer and they get worse or perhaps even die.

We pray for two people to get a job and one gets the opportunity while the other is still job hunting without success.

Doesn't it make you wonder why? Did we pray the wrong prayer? Didn't we pray for healing? Did we not pray with enough faith? Is there some unconfessed sin in our lives so God didn't hear?

Thoughts like these can run through our mind, and these may all be a possibility, we can have all our ducks in a row, and God's answer won't necessarily come the way we expect.

C. That's what makes God, God. He is not our servant, we are his. He is able to look at the big picture, and he is able to answer according to his perfect will. Sometimes his answer may not be very satisfying to us because God doesn't do what we thought he should do.

I imagine the disciples were disappointed God didn't save James. Think of all the good ministry this disciple of Jesus could have done over his lifetime.

God knew that, yet his plan was not to answer in the way they expected. God's plan was to bring James into his glorious home in heaven. That's why Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

God's plan is above all and through all! We should love that He has that plan for all of us, even though there are times when we will see through that mirror dimly and wonder why!

We live in the tension between **praying in faith, believing God will answer and letting God answer his way and in his timing.**

But it does not mean we give up praying. We keep praising, we keep thanking, we keep interceding for others, and we keep doing it together.

We need a unified effort to pray for every person in our community. Sending out postcards asking for prayer requests, placing a prayer box at any establishment who will let us, and put together a team to collect, pray, and keep in touch with those needing prayer.

Working together in cooperation as partners, a people and as a church.

People should be able to call our church a praying church. Are we interested getting a reputation as a church of prayer? We will talk about that next week as we conclude this series on prayer.

Amen? Think about it, pray about it...alone, or with a partner, or in a group. How is God calling you specifically to join or form a prayer group? Trust me, He will answer!

Let us pray...