

Encounter Church
Sunday September 03, 2023

When the Church Prays
The Priority of Praying Together

My goal this morning is to show you from God's Word the value of corporate prayer so that you will never view the prayer meetings of our church the same again.

Why am I talking about this today? I bring the issue of praying together up for three reasons:

1. Corporate prayer is on par with preaching and teaching as a priority in a healthy church.
2. Praying together is a vital key to opening God's presence and work among His people in unique ways.
3. The tendency among believers, even among those who occupy leadership positions in the church, is to think of prayer gatherings as the extra-curricular activity in the life of the church.

It's good to have, but not important enough to join; something you briefly tack on to a meeting before you get down to the real business.

There are a growing number of believers who view prayer meetings as optional, secondary.

This morning I am on a mission: I want to convince you that God has sovereignly ordained the corporate praying of a church, such that His mighty workings increase exponentially and His purposes are accelerated when we pray together.

I'm not trying to minimize personal prayer.

Instead, it is to show you that personal prayer alone will not result in the working of God to the degree needed for spiritual transformation in our lives, our church, our cities, and our nation.

I want to talk to you about being a Praying Church! Praying Churches are used of God to change the world. Why is PRAYING TOGETHER so VALUABLE?

- 1. Praying together was a priority of Jesus Christ!**

When Jesus talked about prayer 33 of 37 verses were addressed to a plural audience instead of a singular audience!

In other words, Jesus' instruction decisively leaned toward praying with others, not just praying in private.

Matthew 6:9-13- "Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Jesus deliberately emphasized the significance of praying together!

Matthew 18:19- "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven."

This focus of Jesus' on more than one praying indicates that there is a design of God's in such gatherings, through which He uniquely and powerfully works.

2. Praying together was a priority for the Apostles!

So the apostles made it a practice and a priority to teach about praying with fellow believers and to practice it because they had heard and seen Jesus emphasize the same thing.

In Acts 6, the Church in Jerusalem faced one of its first dilemmas. Here's how it happened:

Acts 6:1-4- "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

This isn't speaking of the personal prayer life of the Apostles!

Acts 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."

Acts 1:24- "And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen"

Acts 2:42- "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Acts 3:1- “Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.”

Acts 4:23-24- “As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God:...”

Acts 4:31- “After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.”

So by testimony and by example, it is plain that the apostles placed a high premium on the people of God praying together.

They considered guiding the corporate prayer life of the church just as critical a priority as the preaching/teaching of God's Word.

3. Praying together was a priority in the early church!

The Book of Acts records the mighty works of God for and through His church in its early years, and clearly connects them to unified, corporate prayer.

The 120 were gathered in an upper room praying in one accord when Pentecost comes (Acts 1:13; 2:1).

The disciples prayed for wisdom in knowing who Judas' replacement should be (Acts 1:24).

When Peter and John reported the Sanhedrin's threats, those gathered cried out to God in one accord for boldness, and the place was shaken where they prayed (Acts 4:24, 31).

The church prayed over the seven men appointed to serve the widows (Acts 6:6).

After James was martyred and Peter imprisoned by Herod, the church was fervently praying, and God miraculously delivered Peter from his cell (Acts 12:1-11)

Acts 12:5- “So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.”

While the prophets and teachers were praying and fasting, the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to go on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-2).

Acts 13:1-3- “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and

fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away."

Paul and Silas were praying when God sent an earthquake that resulted in the conversion of the jailer and their release (Acts 16:25).

Acts 16:25- "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."

Again, let me say that I am not discouraging personal, private prayer.

Ananias was praying alone when God instructed him to go to Saul (Acts 9:10ff.).

Peter was alone on the rooftop when he had his famous vision leading him to share the Gospel with a Gentile named Cornelius (Acts 10:9)

Nevertheless, the majority of God's recorded workings came when His people prayed together.

4. Praying together has been a priority throughout church history!

There are so many examples of how corporate prayer was the springboard for the sweeping movements of God. I'll just mention one!

On Father's Day June 18, 1995, a Sunday, the Brownsville revival began in Pensacola FL. Evangelist Steve Hill was the guest speaker, having been invited by Pastor John Kilpatrick. Later, Hill and Kilpatrick, told of "a mighty wind" that blew through the church.

What led up to the revival? A 2-year prayer initiative for revival began in 1993, culminating in 1995 in what is now called the Pensacola Outpouring or the Brownsville Revival.

Just after the revival started Pastor Kilpatrick spoke on a Sunday at First Assembly of God in Port Arthur, TX. and talked about the 2 year prayer meeting.

They discontinued traditional Sunday evening church services and gathered for a prayer meeting and prayed over the Nations.

I could tell you story after story of how corporate prayer became the springboard for a mighty movement of God. But I want to add one more thing about the priority of praying together.

5. Praying together is a priority for God's work today!

Right now, the Gospel is sweeping the globe at a rate that is unimaginable

.In almost every quarter of the globe, Christianity is advancing...except for four primary areas: North America, Japan, Australia, and Western Europe.

Guess what one of the common denominators is everywhere Christianity marches forward? ***Christians spend time in prayer together.***

Track what God is doing in Korea, in China, in India, in Eastern Africa, and you will find behind the scenes prayer meetings.

I know what you're thinking. Our prayer meetings don't seem to convey that sort of power.

You be the change that's needed.

My prayer is that you will determine to take one step forward in your participation and confidence in prayer, not just as an individual, but with other believers, gathered together with the purpose of seeing God's glory manifested.

WHEN THE CHURCH PRAYS!

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you today?