

THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER

SESSION #4

“They Lifted Their Voices”: The Power of Corporate Prayer

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The Current State of the Church



“We do not live in a praying age. We live in an age of hustle and bustle, of man’s efforts and man’s determination, of man’s confidence in himself and in his own power to achieve things, an age of human organization, and human machinery, and human push, and human scheming, and human achievements; in the things of God this means no real achievement at all. I think it would be perfectly safe to say, that the Church of Christ was never in all its history so fully and so skillfully and so thoroughly and so perfectly organized as it is today. . . .

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“Our machinery is wonderful, it is just perfect; but alas it is machinery without power, and when things do not go right, instead of going to the real source of our failure, our neglect to depend upon God and to look to God for power, we look around to see if there is not some new organization we can set up, some new wheel that we can add to our machinery. We have altogether too many wheels already. What we need is not so much some new organization, some new wheel, but ‘the Spirit of the living creature in the wheels’ whom we already possess.”

—R. A. Torrey

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“Most pastors testify to the decline in personal, family, and corporate prayer across the nation. Even the recently organized ‘concerts of prayer’ are fairly discouraging from an historical perspective: some of them, at least, are so blatantly manipulative that they are light- years away from the prayer meetings held in parts of the world that have tasted a breath of heaven-sent revival. Moreover, it is far from clear that they are changing the prayer habits of our churches, or the private discipline of significant numbers of believers.”

—D. A. Carson, *Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 16

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The Teaching of Jesus

- **Matthew 6:9-13** – “Pray, then, in this way:
 ‘Our Father who is 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 do not lead us into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.”

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The Practice of the Early Church

- **Acts 1:14** – “These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”
- **Acts 2:42** – “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”
- **Acts 4:23-24** – “When they [Peter & John] had been released, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, ‘O Lord . . .

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- **Romans 12:10-12** – “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.”
- **Colossians 4:2** – “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving.*”
- The verb “devoted to” (προσκαρτερέω, *proskartereō*) is used in these texts to describe the early believers existing or necessary attitude toward prayer.
- “To persist in something; to busy oneself with, be busily engaged in, to hold fast to, to persevere in” (BDAG, 881). It “connotes a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action” (Longenecker, “Acts,” *EBC*, 289).

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“Prayer was much more central in the life of the church in the first century than it is today. Prayer meetings today are a thing of the past, and even the pastoral prayer has been jettisoned in many churches. The average Christian today considers prayer almost entirely a private activity, while the early church reversed that and thought first of corporate prayer and then of individual prayer. . . . From the beginning, corporate prayer was the core of the early church’s life.”



—Grant Osborne, “Corporate Prayer in the New Testament,” 253

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“I think that praying in the assembly of other believers is more neglected than praying alone. . . . The New Testament is full of corporate prayer gatherings. In fact most prayer in the New Testament is probably thought of in terms of gatherings for prayer.”

—John Piper, *Be Devoted to Prayer*

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**Six Reasons Why
Corporate Prayer
Is Particularly Powerful**



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1. God is glorified more in corporate prayer than in private prayer.

- **John 17:20-23** – “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”
- **Ephesians 4:3-6** – “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

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- **Romans 15:5-6** – “Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- “With one mind” (Acts 1:14); “with one accord” (Acts 4:24); “with one voice” (Rom 15:6); etc.
- Corporate prayer gives the most vivid demonstration of the unity of believers. This prayer-unity beautifully reflects both God’s *intent* for the church and Jesus’ *intercession* for the church.
- **1 Timothy 2:8** – “Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.”

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“A biblical theology of corporate prayer teaches us that God’s people will become what they are—united in Christ—as we learn to speak to the Lord together. Speaking together, after all, trains the desires of our hearts to be united in faith, united in hope, united in love. Corporate prayer in the church requires the church to agree, to be without division, to be of the same mind and judgment (1 Cor 1:10). It’s one way the church ‘stands firm in one spirit’ and ‘with one mind strives side by side for the faith’ (Phil 1:27).”



—Jim Hamilton, “A Biblical Theology of Corporate Prayer,”
9Marks Journal

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2. God manifests His presence more in corporate prayer than in private prayer.

- **Psalm 22:3** – “Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel” (*lit.* “inhabit the praises”).
- **Matthew 18:15-20** – “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

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- Even though Matthew 18:15-20 teaches specifically about church discipline, it nonetheless teaches about the manifestation of God's glory *in* the prayers offered regarding the discipline process.
- There is a greater dimension of power associated with "asking" the Father when "two of you agree" (Matt 18:19).
- Moreover, Jesus specifically promises to be "in their midst" "where two or three have gathered together in My name" (Matt 18:20).

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3. There is more edification in corporate prayer than in private prayer.

- **1 Corinthians 14:13-19** – "Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is *the outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. Otherwise if you bless in the spirit *only*, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified. I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue."

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- **Colossians 3:16-17** – “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” (See also Eph 5:18-21.)
- Prayer offered in private, unheard and unknown by others, produces no practical benefit beyond the individual. But prayer offered in public, encourages, exhorts, and instructs the body of Christ.
- In public prayer, we not only speak to God, but to others.

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4. There is greater partnership in ministry through corporate prayer than through private prayer.

- **Romans 15:30-32** – “Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and *that* my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find *refreshing* rest in your company.”
- **2 Thessalonians 3:1-2** – “Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you; and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.”

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- **Ephesians 6:18-20** – “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”
- **Colossians 4:3-4** – “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.”

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- Corporate prayer for the spread of the gospel (Matt 9:37-38; Acts 13:1-3; 2 Thess 3:1; etc.) is the greatest thing members of a church can do when they cannot go to spread the gospel themselves.
- Missionary zeal often grows hottest there where corporate prayer for missions flourishes.
- “Many of us cannot reach the mission field on our feet, but we can reach them on our knees” (T. J. Bach).

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“It is God’s will through his wonderful grace, that the prayers of his saints should be one of the great principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ’s kingdom in the world. When God has something very great to accomplish for his church, it is his will that there should precede it the extraordinary prayers of his people.”

—Jonathan Edwards, *Thoughts on Revival*

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5. There is more rejoicing in response to corporate prayer than to private prayer.

- **2 Corinthians 1:10b-11** – “And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through *the prayers of many.*”
- **2 Corinthians 4:15** – “For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”

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- **Romans 12:15** – “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”
- There are few things as encouraging and joy-inspiring than an answer to prayer. That joy is multiplied directly by the number of those who shared that burden of prayer.

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“The reason for praying is so that God will be thanked when the blessings come. And God loves to be thanked. He loves to be acknowledged and praised as the giver of all good gifts. His great goal in history from beginning to end is to be glorified as the source of all blessing. Therefore, when we urge many people to pray for something that we need, we create a situation in which the provision of that need will produce many thanksgivings to God. And in that way we tap into a tremendous incentive that God has, namely, to glorify Himself by winning the gratitude of many people. God loves to be thanked by many people. Therefore, there is a power in church-wide prayer, because the more people there are praying for the spiritual life of our church, the more thanksgiving will ascend to God when He gives it.” —John Piper

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6. There is more learning that occurs in corporate prayer than in private prayer.

- **Luke 11:1-2** – “It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.’”
- Prayer is both *taught* and *caught*.
- Young believers in particular can learn how to speak to God biblically by observing and listening to those who are mature in prayer.

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SIX REASONS WHY CORPORATE PRAYER IS TO BE PRIZED

1. God is glorified more in corporate prayer than in private prayer.
2. God manifests His presence more in corporate prayer than in private prayer.
3. There is more edification in corporate prayer than in private prayer.
4. There is greater partnership through corporate prayer than through private prayer.
5. There is more rejoicing in response to corporate prayer than to private prayer.
6. There is more learning that occurs in corporate prayer than in private prayer.

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