

Community And... Prayer

Various Texts

Speaker: Pastor Mark Schindler

Oct 27, 2019 PM



Community and... Prayer

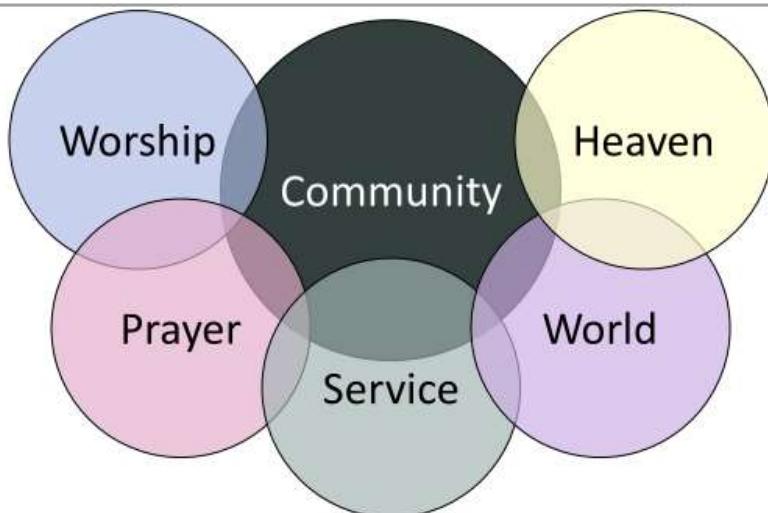
COMMUNITY AND... SERIES

OCTOBER 27, 2019

Clearcreek Chapel Pulpit Ministry



Community And...



COMMUNITY AND PRAYER

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Tonight, we continue our series and look at another intersection of community and five important spiritual functions of our living in Christ. Last week we looked at how being in community in Christ impacts what we do in the context of worship. This evening we will take a similar look at the context of prayer. Our purpose is to better understand how being in community as God's people specifically works itself out as engage God together in prayer.

One of the greatest compliments and accomplishments I credit to my mother was that she was a prayer warrior. She devoted her early mornings each day to pray for her children, grandchildren, and many of those in her church. Her example has lived long past her homegoing and reminds me often of the importance and power of prayer.

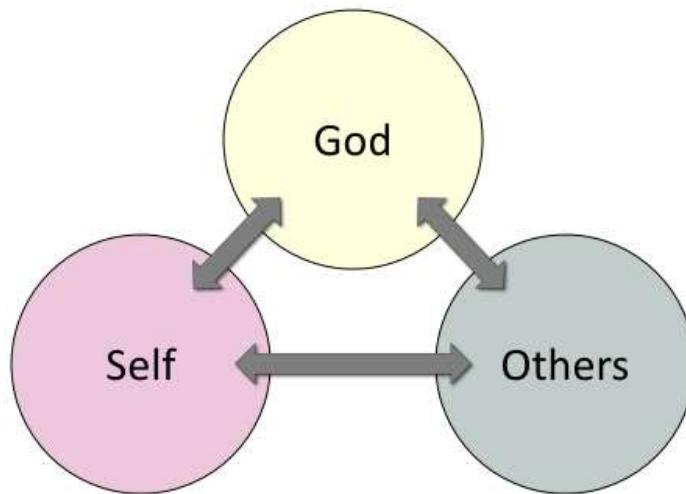
You see, prayer is a tremendous privilege, an awesome responsibility, and a great joy. In prayer we have the opportunity to openly communicate to a sovereign God about our desires, struggles and delights. And yet it is often something we struggle with. I will note here at the beginning of this message that while the blessing of prayer is experienced in part as private communications with God, my focus tonight is on prayer for others and with others. Without question, personal prayer is important and commanded in scripture, but there is something wonderful about encountering God through prayer in community. Prayers that are shared and experienced together unite our hearts and have a way of opening our eyes to the work of God in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Our God is a triune community of persons who exist and communicate in relationship to one another. And as his creatures we are created in His image to be communicators. God has communicated to us through His written word and though the living Word, His Son. Our prayers then, are a reflection of the communicating nature of God as those who bear His image. The more I have studied prayer in scripture, the more I have come to see that worship and prayer have much in common. Prayer, like worship, is a response to and reflection that we communicate to God. While in different forms, they are both communication to God.

We do not have time tonight, but it is clear from scripture that communication with God has been and continues to be an essential part of the life of God's people. Moses, Job, and many other people in the Old Testament spoke to God. The Old Testament is filled with prayers offered up to God on behalf of the tribe and nation of Israel. Jesus taught his disciples to pray. And one of the primary functions of the early church was to gather to pray for one another. The New Testament authors often prayed in their letters and asked for prayers on behalf of others. Throughout scripture, we see that prayer brings encouragement, change, comfort, and expresses joy together. These examples of prayer in community powerfully show a love for other believers, a collective passion for God's glory, and lives united in submission to God's will.

[opening prayer]

Me vs. We



COMMUNITY AND PRAYER

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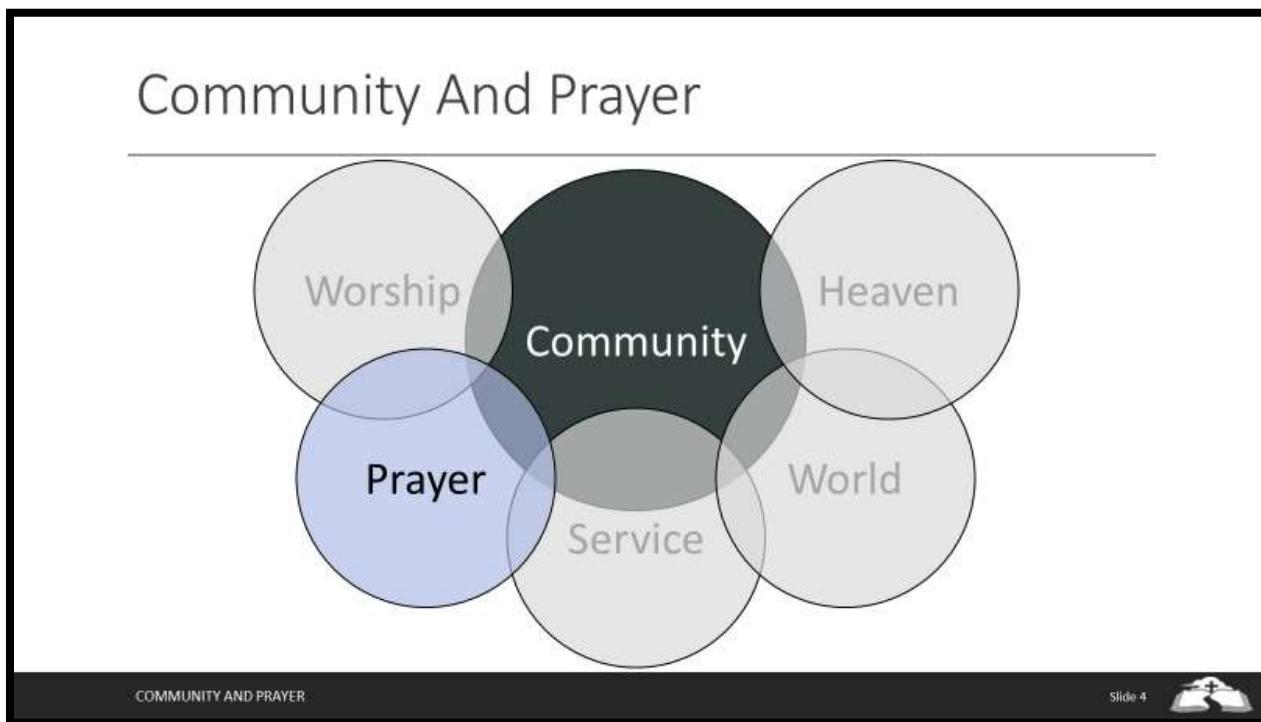
As we noted last week with worship, there is a clear personal and public element to our prayer lives. I believe that scripture teaches us to balance these two modes of praying. If we pray primarily in private, then we miss on sharing in the power of God at works in the lives of others. If we pray primarily in public, then we lack in an essential communication with God needed to sustain our walk in Christ. But we must be careful not to allow our prayers to become corrupted. We can easily take a good desire to pray for others and turn it into a vehicle for gossip. We can pray using spiritual words and phrases that are meant to make us look spiritual and gain the favor of men rather than God. And we would be fools not to see the constant pressure of Satan and this world to keep us from living out biblical community as God intended.

So even in our prayer life, there is an underlying tension between Me and We. Just as in gathered worship, I believe there is a fundamental question of how much we value community and making time to pray with and for one another. It is a constant battle to guard against lives that are too busy to make time to make time to pray for others; both personally and in community. We often minimize the fact that we are in a spiritual battle against the world and our flesh. Satan delights in keeping us from communicating with God in prayer. He will tempt us with excuses of comfort, family, commitments, and work to keep us from joining together in prayer; whether it is in our homes, gathered as flocks, or as we gather on Sundays.

Tonight, as we look at the intersection of community and prayer, it is my desire to help us see not only the priority of community prayers, but how Me can get in the way of We. As with worship, we must strive to work out our personal relationship with Christ and bring prayers to God out of the silence and reverence of our hearts. But as believers, God has made to be a part of the body of Christ. He did not intend for each part to live independent of the whole. Our prayers were never meant to be communicated to God only as an individualistic Me and not as a part of

the connected We of being God's people. There is a larger aspect to prayer in our commitment to community, for and with those who need both our prayers and our presence.

Listen to what Paul Tripp says in his book, Whiter Than Snow: Meditations on Sin and Mercy. "We weren't created to be independent, autonomous, or self-sufficient. We were made to live in a humble, worshipful, and loving dependency upon God and in a loving and humble interdependency with others. Our lives were designed to be community projects. Yet, the foolishness of sin tells us that we have all that we need within ourselves. So we settle for relationships that never go beneath the casual. We defend ourselves when the people around us point out a weakness or a wrong. We hold our struggles within, not taking advantage of the resources God has given us." (p. 147)



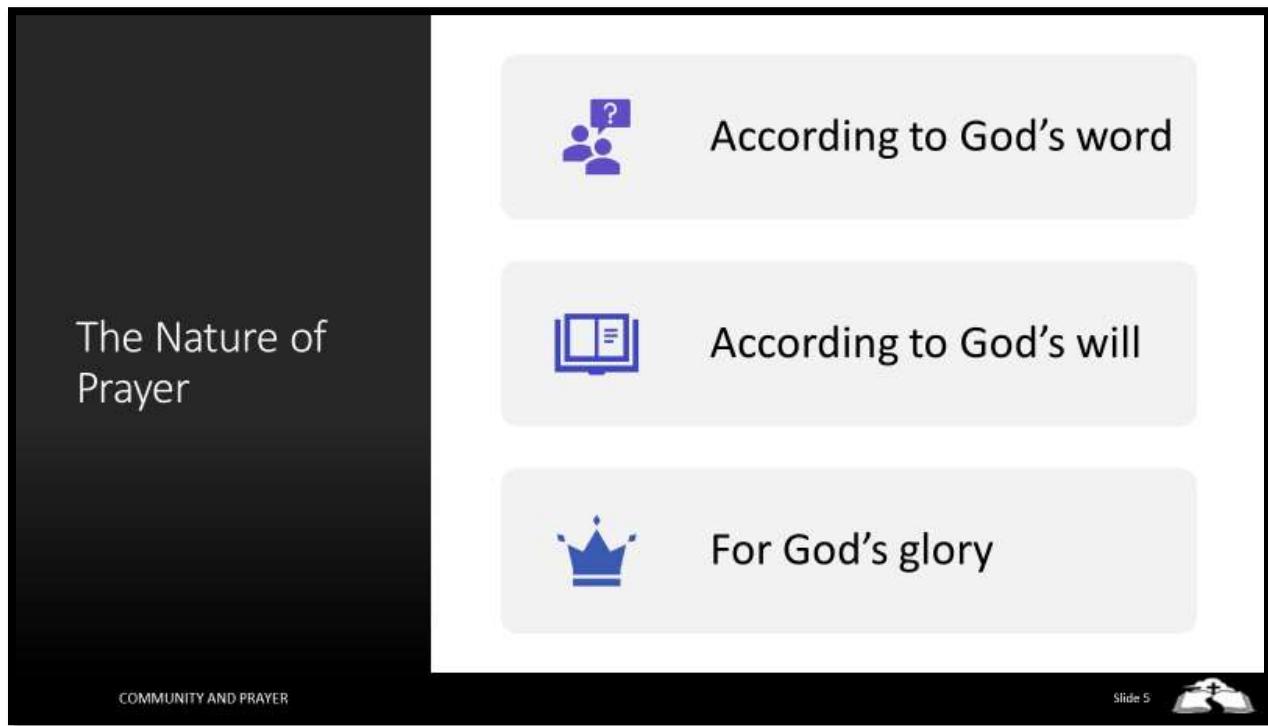
So tonight, I want us to turn our hearts and minds to the intersection of community and prayer. We need to hear truth in a world that counters and corrupts the message of the Bible. Culturally, we are repeatedly told to value independence and individualism above any sense of community. Culturally, we are repeatedly told that self and family are the most important priorities in our lives. These corrupted priorities seep into our thinking and values and we develop an unbiblical sense of individualism and disconnectedness from the being God's people. Today, the idea of having a strong commitment to a single church and the community of people in a church is no longer a normative practice for believers. But brothers and sisters, I tell you with all my heart that I do not believe this to be the message of the Bible.

It is ironic that many will claim a church as theirs, but function largely on the fringe of community. Prayer meetings are now a thing of the past for the modern church. And the reality is that some who say they are committed in prayer to one another, do so partially at best and outside any gathering of God's people. They are often absent from prayers of the Body

when they share a request or need. Nor do they connect with others to pray and support them in their struggles. And for many who desperately need the prayers of others, they do not feel comfortable or are willing to share those needs. Too often we gather in community wearing masks that hide the hurt and pain of our lives. And in pretending that everything is just fine, we keep ourselves from power and protection of God in prayer.

I'm not saying that praying in community is a secret spiritual formula that makes our prayers more powerful or palatable to God. The power is not in our prayers, but rather in the God we pray to. But it is as Keller writes in his book on this subject, that prayer is about aligning our hearts with God's will and purposes. When we pray together, we collectively share our needs and desires, leaving them with God **together** and resting in His divine providence **together**.

And while there is nothing magical to prayers offered in community, there is something special that happens when we gather. We come together before God's throne with unity and confidence. We come together knowing that our prayers will be answered according to His sovereign will and for His glory. In community, there is a sure and shared blessing as God moves through the combined prayers of brothers and sisters collected and offered up together as His people.



The Nature of Prayer

-  According to God's word
-  According to God's will
-  For God's glory

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Before we look at prayer and community, it is important that we take a few minutes to biblically define the nature of prayer. Timothy Keller, in his book title "Prayer" defines prayer this way. He writes, "*Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him.*" (p. 48) You see prayer is this amazing personal conversation, where as ordinary humans we meet with the divine God of the universe. It is a spiritual communication that bridges earth and heaven as an active exercise of faith that He hears and listens to us.

The first aspect to the nature of prayer is that it is to be according to God's word. Since prayer is a response to God, it is important that we communicate to Him using the knowledge of Him and the vocabulary He gives from in His word. Without a knowledge of God and the language, if you will, of scripture, our prayers are at best, limited. And at worst, we pray to a God of our own making and a vocabulary born out of our own sinful desires for self-fulfillment. In any relationship, our ability to communicate with someone is based on knowing them and sharing a common way of speaking. If prayer is a personal conversation with God, then it is essential that we know who He is and speak with the words and truths He has given us.

The second aspect to the nature of prayer is that it is to be according to God's will. Keller's book on prayer challenged me to rethink my prayer life and make God's will the heart of my requests. It reminded me that the purpose of my prayer is to be less about what I want and more about what God wants. To be sure, these are much harder prayers. They require a greater act of faith to trust the outcome to a sovereign God. But when we pray using the language and truths of the Bible, prayer becomes a conversation whereby I am aligning my will with God's, and not the other way around. Prayer is not a tool to be used selfishly to help God correctly aim. But rather it is tool to aim my own heart and mind at the greater glory of God.

This brings us to the third key aspect to the nature of prayer and that it is all about God's glory. The reality is that my prayers are often a vain attempt for me to control the circumstances around me. What my prayers should be are humble requests for God to so fully rule in my heart, that I gladly submit to His will with joy. I can only rest when I truly know that He is all I need. God receives the greatest glory, not when I ask God to change my circumstances, but when I ask God to change my heart in those circumstances to seek the glory of His kingdom. Please know that our prayers are to be intimate and open conversations with the Father where we share our innermost struggles and weaknesses. But like Jesus, we get to a point in that conversation where we bow our hearts and say, "Not my will, but Your will be done."

Colossians 1:9-14



How...

Regular prayer for others that God would fill them through His Word so they will know Him and gladly submit to His will



Why...

Walking worthy of Christ; bearing fruit of good works; and growing in knowledge of God



Resulting in...

Strength by God's power; giving thanks to the Father; and delivered to the Kingdom of God's Son

COMMUNITY AND WORSHIP

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With that view of prayer in mind, let's look at two passages that reflect on what it means to pray in community. The first passage we will look at is found in Colossians Chapter 1, verses 9 through 14. Please turn there as we read God's word. Follow along as I read Colossians 1:9-14.

"9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Have you ever asked someone the question, "How can I pray for you?" It's a good question and is meant to learn and get more information to inform our prayers. In these verses, Paul answers that same question, "How can I pray for you?". But he does so in a more general way. Following his typical opening prayer of thanksgiving, Paul provides us with a great example and a vocabulary we can use to pray for others in the body of Christ.

In verse 9, we first see the commitment to pray for others. We are to pray without ceasing. In other words, Paul regularly kept on praying for them. Paul's example is that of never ending in his constant prayers for the believers in Colossi. Like Paul, our love for others drives us to a discipline in prayer that is regular, persistent, and steadfast; whether or not we feel like it.

Look at the last half of verse 9. When we pray for others, what should we ask for? Paul prays that they may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. It is good to pray for healing, an end to suffering, and for needs to be met. But our prayers

should not end there. We are to pray that our brothers and sisters may be filled with a knowledge of God and His will. We are to pray for wisdom and discernment that is not of this world. Is this how you pray for others? Are you in regularly in this kind of prayer for those in this community? Do you pray for others that God would fill them through His word so they will know Him and gladly submit to His will? This is the example that Paul gives us in verse 9.

In verse 10, Paul answers the question of why we should be in prayer for others. Why is this kind of praying for others to be a priority? So that they may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and be fully pleasing to him. That they may bear the fruit of good works and increase in knowledge of God.

Our prayers for others have three purposes that flow out of this verse. First, that their walking would be in manner worthy of our Lord. We are to pray that their walk would match the character of Christ, that they might be pleasing to Him. The second purpose is that they would bear the fruit of good works. We pray that their heart's desire would be to please God with lives that bear the fruit of righteousness. The third purpose is that they would be growing in their knowledge of God. We are to pray that they would daily increase in their knowledge of God that they would understand and apply of the power of the Gospel in their lives.

In verses 11 through 14, Paul gives us the results of this kind of prayer. In verse 11 we see that we are being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might. God gives the strength to endure hardship with patience and joy. And in community, these prayers are multiplied as others join in with one voice to the Lord. In verse 12, we see that there is giving of thanks to the Father because He has redeemed us. God gives us grace to be thankful. And in community we delight in prayers that remind us of the inheritance we share in Christ together.

And finally, in verses 13 and 14, we see that God has delivered us from domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His glorious Son. When we pray for others as Paul prayed for the Colossians, God humbles us to make much of our redemption and all that we have in Christ. And in community the gaze of our prayers is transferred from the troubles and cares of this world, to the power and beauty of our Lord who has redeemed us and forgiven all our sins.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12



Worthy...

Of the high calling to follow Christ



Pleasing...

Lives abundantly full of righteousness desires and works of faith



Glorifying...

That Christ would be glorified in them and they in Christ



Our second passage this evening is 2 Thessalonians 1:11 and 12. This passage is similar to the verses in Colossians we just looked at. As we read these two verses, look for the parallels in thought as Paul reminds the Thessalonians of his prayers for them. Please follow along as I read these verses. *"11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

Verse 11 here, is the bookend to verse 5 where Paul uses a similar phrase about being considered worthy of the kingdom of God. In verse 11, Paul writes that they pray always for the Thessalonian church. To what end do they pray? That God would make them worthy of their calling to salvation. Paul and those traveling with him were constantly in prayer that those whom God had saved would live in a way that is worthy of that high calling. They prayed that these believers would walk in a manner of faith and obedience as a testimony before all. These were prayers for God's people to trust His will with righteous and holy lives in the middle of suffering and hardship.

In the last half of verse 11, Paul provides another reason for their prayers. These sense of Paul's request here is to ask God to make their lives abundantly full of righteousness desires and works of faith. Is this how we pray for others? Is our first priority to ask that a spouse, a child, or a brother or sisters in Christ live a righteous life? That they exhibit a faith that holds fast to God and His will in the midst of trials? The fullness of Paul's example here is for us to be busy with prayers for others that God work in them for His sake and through the transforming power of the Gospel.

The last part of this prayer follows the phrase “so that” beginning verse 12. Look again at the reason for this kind of prayer. Paul does not say that they prayed this way so that their suffering would end. Their first priority does not seem to be an end to their persecution and affliction. They prayed that Christ would be glorified in them and they in Christ. The intention of their prayer was for their lives to be about bringing Christ glory. And all of this being due to the unmerited favor and mercies shown to us in salvation according to the marvelous grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. May God grant us the kind of discipline and love for others that consistently lifts others up with prayers like this.

Reflect and Respond



Me

Focus is on my wants/needs

Makes time mostly for self

Private and isolated

We

Focus on other's wants/needs

Values time with others

Shared and multiplied



As we close tonight, I would like to reflect again on the Me vs. We contrast that we looked at last week. What I am about to say may be challenging, and that's Ok. It is challenging to me. But perhaps prayer in community is an area we all need to work in. At the Chapel, our primary place of community prayer is flock. It is there that we collectively share our requests, offer praises and adoration, and at times confess sinful attitudes and actions. It is an important time of sharing struggles, rejoicing together, and expressing our trust and hope in God.

So as we close, let's first consider what Me oriented prayer looks like. Again, this is not an inclusive list. And please understand that my purpose here is not to compare private and gathered prayer. But I hope that you have been challenged to consider the importance of prayer in community. And I hope that you will look for subtle ways in which we can lose sight of important aspects of praying for and with others.

When prayer is wrongly about Me, it becomes more about praying for my needs at the expense of praying for others. This may be due to a selfish focus on our needs and the needs of those who are close to us. It may be a result of a lack of time to spend in prayer for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Or it may be due to a lack gathering in community in a way that allows be to

know what is going on in the lives of others. Regardless of the reason, our prayers become mostly about us, those immediately around us, and control over circumstances.

Lastly, when prayer is about Me, it is evidenced by a tendency to isolate ourselves from the larger community. We do not make the time to build relationships that foster knowing what is going on in the lives of others. This often results in a lack of openness and willingness to share personal struggles over sin or to confess wrongs and seek forgiveness. It is very difficult to engage in effective prayer for others when you have little to no engagement in their lives. Moreover, I believe there is something more personal and more powerful about praying when you are with someone. Private prayers will never be the same as prayers that are shared in tears of sorrow, the warm connection of holding hands, or mutual words of praise offered to God in prayer.

Contrast this to prayer that better serves the We of community. These are prayers that flow out of an awareness of others. We intentionally think of their lives and how to effectively pray that they bring glory to God. Just as with worship, parents, you have a responsibility to teach children who to rightly pray for others and set an example of open, honest, and meaningful prayer. Keep in mind that every decision you make shows your children what you truly value. Our prayer lives should show a commitment to not only praying **for** others, but also **with** others in community. This means making time to gather in prayer and even disrupting family schedules to serve greater priorities of prayer and fellowship together.

When prayer is about We, there is shared joy and comfort in openly communicating trials and struggles with one another. We make sure that we are approachable and are willing to be interrupted when someone asks us to pray for them. When prayer is about We, our joys, praise, and thanksgiving are multiplied as they are lifted up to God together. We delight in being together to pray. We recognize that in consistently praying together we build spiritual bonds that draw us closer to God and one another.

Like worship, prayers for and with one another should a priority in our lives. For all of us, it is worth an evaluation of our lives and priorities to see if they align with the pattern and commands of scripture. It is worth working at praying using the vocabulary of scripture and striving to pray intentionally according to God's will. May God draw us near to his heart that we would love one another with a deep love that regularly prays in fervent prayer together. I May we be devoted so greatly to Christ and His body, that our prayer lives would flourish to the glory of His name.

[Let's pray]

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