

Pray Together As the People of God

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[0 : 00] Well, he leads us through his word. So take your Bibles and turn to the book of Acts chapter 1. We're very thankful to have Pastor Aaron Hoke with us to preach for us this evening.

And so he's asking me to read this passage. Acts chapter 1 and verse 12. We'll read through verse 26.

Acts 1, 12. Then they return, that's the apostles, to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus, and Zimon the Zealot, and Judas, son of James.

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. In those days, Peter stood up among the believers, a group numbering about 120, and said, Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.

[1 : 34] He was one of our number and shared in this ministry. With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field. There he fell headlong, his body burst open, and all his intestines spilled out.

Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called the field in their language, El Kadamah, that is, the field of blood. For, said Peter, Therefore, it is written in the book of Psalms, May his place be deserted, let there be no one to dwell in it, and may another take his place of leadership.

Therefore, it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us.

For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. So they proposed two men, Joseph, called Barsabbas, also known as Justice, and Matthias.

And then they prayed, Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry which Judas left to go where he belongs.

[2 : 47] And they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias, and so he was added to the eleven apostles. You can turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 6.

I want to come to Acts 1 soon enough, but I want to start in Ephesians 6 tonight. Thank you for welcoming me back and for the privilege of opening the Word of God. Thank you for singing tonight, ministering to my soul, and hearing the voices of God's people lifted up.

And we sang just moments ago, death of death and hell's destruction. Land me safe on Canaan's side.

And death, the first death is capitalized. Death of death and hell's destruction. Destruction is capitalized. And what you're singing when you sing that is a prayer to a person.

Death of death and hell's destruction. You're asking this person to land you safe on Canaan's side. You know who the death of death is? You know who hell's destruction is for the people of God?

[3 : 58] It's Jesus. And I'm thankful that God's given the church hymn writers that speak vividly and remind us of who our Savior is in no uncertain terms, that for the child of God, Jesus is the death of death.

And it's talking about crossing the Jordan. He's not saying you're going to avoid death, but you're going to live forever. Jesus is the death of death. And tonight's message is not centered on the work of Jesus.

It's a message about praying together as the people of God. But brothers and sisters, if we don't have Jesus, we don't have prayer. We don't have access to God through the mediator Jesus.

We don't have salvation. We don't have a God to whom to pray or at least who will listen to us without the Lord Jesus Christ, without the death of death, without hell's destruction. And if you don't know the death of death tonight, if you don't know hell's destruction, if you don't know Jesus, you can tune me out for the rest of the night if you will do business with God and say, come have mercy on me.

[5 : 08] I need the death of death because if you don't take it for me, Jesus, I'm going to die forever. So you have dealings with God tonight. And then you come talk to me and we'll talk about praying together and how important that is as a child of God.

To pray together with God's people. But if you don't know the death of death, you run to Jesus tonight. Now, I want to preach to you about the importance of and the benefits of corporate prayer, praying together as the people of God.

And as I do that, I want to, or I have a couple of audiences in mind. I've preached this to our church back at the beginning of the year to challenge us to be better about the practice of praying together as the people of God.

And so the couple of audiences I have in mind tonight in preaching it for Grace Fellowship Church in Bremen is the first audience is those who are already committed to praying together as the people of God.

And that may be more who you have on a Sunday night. Those that are committed already to the life of the church, the body of the church together. But I want to specifically encourage those of you that are already committed to the importance of praying together as the people of God.

[6 : 18] You're convinced of its importance and that is reflected in your practice. If that is you tonight, you are to be commended. And what I want to do with this message on praying together as the people of God is to encourage you.

To encourage you that your commitment is well founded. That your practice of praying together with the people of God is wise. There's good reason for it. And if you've been committed to it, but maybe you're flagging it a little bit to encourage you and to stir you up all the more that it's worth it.

That there's good reason for it. Another audience though that I have in mind is those who may be less committed or uncommitted to the practice of corporate prayer.

You may be convinced or unconvinced of its importance, but your practice shows that it's not high on your priority list. And if you're in that second group, I want to do more than encourage you.

I want to challenge you. I want to push you towards corporate prayer with the people of God from the Word of God tonight.

[7 : 28] I want you to see that there's every reason to commit yourself to praying together with the people of God. pretty blunt of me. Yes. Sometimes I need that.

Sometimes I need more than encouragement. Sometimes I need a kick in the pants. Your pastors did not ask me to do this. I just suggested to Jason, I said, would a message on the importance of corporate prayer be appropriate?

He said, I don't think we've touched on that specifically in a while. Yes, that was the extent of my communication with them about the subject. They didn't ask me to do it. I know it's something I need encouragement in, exhortation in, sometimes a kick in the pants in.

It may be easy. I'm the pastor, so I have to show up to prayer meeting because I have to lead it. So I'm there. That doesn't mean that I've got it all down. It doesn't mean that I'm praying well together with the people of God.

It doesn't mean I always am eager to get out the door. We have our prayer meeting on Sunday night. It's our fellowship lunch Sunday, so we're not having prayer meeting tonight. I'm not missing it while I'm preaching to you about the importance of it.

[8 : 29] So just because I'm the pastor and show up to ours doesn't mean that I have it all together in this. I need the encouragement. I need the kick in the pants as well.

And so I hope to encourage us and challenge us tonight with respect to corporate prayer. And I want to largely focus on the benefits of public prayer. Why it's a good thing for us to do.

I want us to see with God's help, not only do we need to pray together as God's people, but it is very good when we do. So what are the benefits of praying together as God's people? I want to focus on three.

First, the benefit of being obedient. There's blessing attached to obedience. And that's not a denial of justification by faith alone. Now, that's the understanding that those who have been justified will

obey God.

They will pursue obedience to God. And when they do, there's blessing attached to that. So I want to talk about the blessing of obedience. When you obey, when you're a kid, you obey.

[9 : 27] At your home, things go better than when you disobey. Right? You don't have to deal with discipline. You don't have strife in your home when you're disobedient. So there's the blessing of obedience.

And I want you to see tonight that God expects us to pray together as His people. So generally, there's the blessing of obedience. Then there's the benefit of answer to prayer. Particularly, we're thinking tonight about praying for the church.

And so the blessing of answered prayer for the growth and strength of the church. And then the third blessing that I want to talk about that comes from corporate prayer is the blessing of mutual encouragement. Right?

So the blessing of obedience, the blessing of answered prayer, and the blessing of mutual encouragement. And I hope those things will encourage you, challenge you where it's needed to the significance of the practice of corporate prayer.

So the first is the benefit of being obedient. God expects His people to pray together. Now I'm going to grant you something up front.

[10 : 29] If you tell me, find me a command in the Bible that says, pray together, I can't quite find you that explicit command, pray together as God's people.

Romans 15.30 gets close if you want to look that up at some point. But it doesn't specifically mention the people of God. And Paul says, strive together with me in prayer.

So are you praying with Paul? Are you praying with his people? But the word together and prayer in that verse, other than that, Romans 15.30, I don't know of an explicit command to pray together, but I hope you'll see that even without that command, something that we think about like church membership where you don't see an explicit command to it, but it's all over the New Testament when you put all the pieces of it together.

I hope you'll see that's the case with respect to praying together as the people of God. So first, there are commands in the epistles to the churches to pray, and there are commands in the plural.

Not you individual pray, but you all pray. And unless you put y'all into our English translations, you're not going to see that in your English translation.

[11 : 35] You plural is the same as you singular in English, unless you're from the South. Then you got y'all, you all, that's you plural. But you don't see that in your English translation, but the commands in the epistles to pray are plural in multiple places.

You all, not just you individually, but you all pray. So here in Ephesians 6 where we've turned, looked with me at verses 17 through 19.

I'm reading out of the ESV tonight. NIV may be a little bit different on some of these, but you'll get the idea. So starting in verse 17, of Ephesians 6, and take, that's in the plural, you all, take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Praying, that's plural, at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert, plural, with all perseverance, making supplication for the saints and also for me that words may be given to me and opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.

So there's this plural command here to keep alert with all perseverance and petition. And so the ESV turns some of the nouns into verbs and the NIV probably does two in different places, but the verb there is keep alert with all prayer and petition and that keep alert is plural.

[12 : 56] And it's a command, I think, for the church to be praying for Paul. If the gospel is going to be declared boldly and responded to appropriately, which is something we ought to be praying for as a church, then the church is going to have to pray.

And I believe, pray together. I'm just going to quote some of these for you. Romans 12.12. In a context, and we want to come to this later, but in a context of mutual benefit and encouragement, listen to this plural command of the Romans.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant, plural, all of you, in prayer. Colossians 4.2. Continue steadfastly, you all, plural, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Right, so there's these commands to the churches in the plural, you all, pray. That's one thing. Then there's the whole tenor of the New Testament that the church is not an isolated bunch of Christians

living life on their own, but is rather the body of Christ living together as the body of Christ. There's an expectation that the church cares for itself, that members care for members, that the church gathers together for worship, which includes what's one of the parts, one of the things that we do.

[14 : 13] We've done it twice together tonight. As you've gathered together, we've prayed twice in the service. Once when Sam led us and once when Jason led us.

And we prayed together as part of our worship. It's expected that the church will gather together and part of worship is prayer. Clearly expected in our church life as a body that we will pray together as the people of God.

In addition to that, there's the example of the early church particularly visible in Acts. And I want to get to that in a few minutes, which is why I had Pastor Jason read in Acts chapter 1. But there's the example of the early church praying together repeatedly in Acts.

Acts. But friends, even without an explicit command that says pray together, it is assumed and expected and I believe required that the church pray together.

The church is to worship together. Part of that is prayer. Churches are commanded in the plural to pray. The life of the church is joined together and part of that life is prayer. And the early church obviously understood the importance of praying together and we should too.

[15 : 29] And so when we pray together as a church, I believe we're being obedient to God's design for and his expectation of the church. And as I said just a moment ago, there are blessings associated with obedience.

Things go better when we obey. There's blessing attached to that. Again, without denying justification by faith alone, I firmly believe that, that our works don't justify us. But there is blessing attached to disobedience even for the people of God and trouble and discipline attached to did I say disobedience?

Attached to disobedience. I think I got it wrong the first time. There's blessing attached to obedience and discipline attached to disobedience. And so the first benefit that I want us to take good note of tonight is that the blessing of obedience.

When we're praying together as the people of God, we're obeying God. We're doing what he expects as the church. Second benefit that we want to talk about is the benefit of answered prayer. Particularly thinking about the health and the growth of the church.

When we pray together as God's people, things happen. God has designed it. He's ordained that we pray and that he would answer our prayers. And besides bearing one another's burdens, which I want to consider as the third benefit and blessing to prayer, something else the church does when she prays together is for the health, praying for the health and well-being of the church for the success of her mission.

[17 : 02] What's your mission as a church? Unless you've changed your constitution on this point, I believe it's threefold, right at the front. To bless God, to worship God, to bless one another, to shepherd the flock, and to be a blessing to those outside, to take the gospel to those outside the walls of the church.

A threefold mission of the church. To worship, to minister to the flock, and to reach out with the gospel. Upward, inward, outward. Threefold mission of the church.

If you want to succeed in the mission of the church, then when the church gathers together, she should be praying for that threefold mission that God would help us to worship, that He would help us to minister to one another, and that He would help us to reach the lost with the gospel.

We want the church to succeed in her mission. And so when the church gathers together, one of the benefits of that is God answering those prayers and seeing the church grow and strengthen, seeing the church succeed in her mission.

Charles Spurgeon is quoted as saying, believe me, if a church does not pray, it is dead. That's strong. I think He's right.

[18 : 14] What if I told you the growth of the early church in the days right after Christ's ascension was directly tied to the church's devotion to prayer? Would you believe me?

If I said the growth of the early church was directly tied to the church praying together? Well, I want you to see that tonight from the book of Acts. I trust you all want to be a strong, healthy, thriving church.

I trust you want to be growing in grace, growing in number. I trust you want to be effective in that threefold mission of the church, seeing sinners saved and added to the church. If you want those things, though, just wanting them, just saying we want them is not enough.

I can want something all day long and if I don't do anything to get it, I'm not going to get it. If you want those things, you want the church to be healthy and thriving and growing, one of the means God has given us to that end is praying together.

Before we come to Acts, you can turn to the book of Acts, but before we come there, let me just remind you that this principle was at work in the Old Testament as well. Here's part of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple.

[19 : 25] 2 Chronicles 6 and verse 21. And listen to the pleas of your servants and of your people Israel when they pray, plural, toward this place and listen from heaven your dwelling place and when you hear, forgive.

Listen to the prayer of your people when they pray and God's response in 2 Chronicles 7, 14 and 15. If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray, plural, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. And that's something. God promises to hear his people when they pray.

In the Old Covenant, he wanted his people to pray and he promised to answer that prayer. We find similar promises of God hearing and answering prayer in the New Covenant as well. So we come to Acts chapter 1 where Pastor Jason read earlier.

And we're just going to do a tour through the book of Acts and I want you to see the church praying together and God answering those prayers and the church thriving and growing as that happens.

[20 : 41] So, I'm not going to reread Acts chapter 1 but right after their Lord and Savior bodily departs, what do his followers do? The apostles and the other early disciples were together and they prayed.

And they were devoted to prayer, it says in verse 14. They were with one accord. I love that.

Multiple people gathered together but with one accord were devoted to prayer.

Right off the bat, what is the early church doing before you see Peter? Preaching? Or any of that?

What are they doing together? Praying. Do you think God expects his church to pray together?

That's the first thing you find them doing. And maybe, you know, they had had Jesus with them and all of a sudden now they don't have Jesus. You think they felt their need of prayer?

You bet they did. Maybe we don't feel it as acutely. We've never had Jesus physically, bodily walking with us and then have his absence and then go, we need him with us but brothers and sisters, we need Jesus with us just as much as the early church did right after Jesus ascended into heaven.

[21 : 48] They sensed their need, no doubt. And they, with one accord, were devoted to prayer. I, when we do our membership class, I remember this Pastor John's illustration of what it means to be devoted to something.

We look at Acts 2.42 and he says, if you, if you jog once a month or maybe every other month, are you devoted to jogging? Nope. If you're devoted, you're at it.

You're consistent. You're faithful. You, you do it when you don't feel like it. You do it when you do feel like it. You do it, you're consistent. This church was devoted to praying with one accord.

Praying together. In that context, Peter speaks of the betrayal of Judas and he proposes naming a twelfth apostle. And, and what we read earlier is how that process went.

And notice in verse 24, in that process, verse 24, and they prayed and said, you Lord, who knows the hearts of all show which one of these two you have chosen.

[22 : 47] So, and right after their prayer, an apostle is added. They prayed together. God answers their prayer. Do you do that? Maybe you're facing a daunting, you know, adding up a twelfth apostle.

That's huge in the life of the church. And so when you're facing big decisions in the life of the church, maybe less frequent or more daunting decisions like adding on to a building like we did when we built this addition or more importantly, adding officers, elders, or deacons to a church or sending a church planter or a missionary or whether it's things that are more common because they're more frequent.

Setting the budget. Supporting missionaries. Having an outreach event. The simple day-to-day outreach and evangelism. We should pray together as a body for God to show us what He would have and that He would bless us in it.

That's what the early church is doing when they're choosing this twelfth apostle to take Judas' place. They pray together. Jump over to Acts chapter 4 and verses 1-3.

Peter and John are arrested for preaching Christ in verses 1-3 of Acts chapter 4. I'm not going to read all of this, but they're arrested for preaching Christ.

[24 : 00] They're put into custody. And then come down to verse 23. They're eventually released and they report back to their friends, presumably the gathered church.

And listen to this, Acts 4-23. And when they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priest and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them.

And they go on and pray and look at their request down in verse 29. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

That's their request. Grant us to speak your word with all boldness. You've got Peter and John.

You've got their friends gathered together. They're praying together.

They've lifted their voice together to God. Sovereign Lord, they pray for speaking with boldness.

Verse 30, While you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus, and when they had prayed, if you didn't know what lifting their voice together was back in verse 24, now you do.

[25 : 08] It says it explicitly here. When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

What did they ask God for? That they would continue to speak the word of God with boldness.

What happens? That happens. God answers their prayer. They're gathered together. They pray. I love this. ESV, it's back up in verse 24.

They lifted, they, plural, lifted their, and ESV has voices. Does the NIV have voice or just voice? NIV gets it. Oh, it's got voices. It's plural.

Singular. They lifted their singular voice. Their one voice. For some reason in English that doesn't work for us.

I don't know if one person was leading them or they're all praying in unison, but they lift their voice. You know what that is?

[26 : 07] That's the church praying together. And God answers their prayer specifically. And that, brothers and sisters, should encourage us to pray. Jump over to Acts chapter 12.

Apostle Peter is in prison again. Recurring theme. Preaches Christ. They don't like it. They throw them in prison. God delivers them. So, that's happened again. And James, probably James, the brother of John.

James and John. This is probably not James. This is not James, the brother of Jesus, because we find him later. This is probably James, the brother of John. But he had been killed. You see that in Acts chapter 12?

And verse 1. About that time, here the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James, the brother of John. It is. There it is. With the sword. Alright? So, one of the, one of James and John has been killed.

Peter is in custody. So, what do you think is coming for Peter? The same thing. So, what does the church do? Verse 5. So, Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

[27 : 16] That's just packed with all sorts of stuff, isn't it? Earnest prayer. They're not ho-hum about it. It's a matter of great significance.

James has just been executed. Peter's head is on the chopping block. And so they pray earnestly. Not half-heartedly, not lackadaisically.

Earnest prayer. And it's made to God. That's what we do when we're praying. We're talking to God. For him, there's someone that they're praying for, Peter, and it's by the church.

Not by this individual over here, that guy over there. By the church. The church is praying together. And the outcome is remarkable. I think I'm already going too long here with what I've got left to go.

So, I'm not going to read it all. But this is one of those humorous moments in the Bible. I hope you have a, you keep your sense of humor on when you're reading through the Bible. There's some funny things in it. Peter, Peter is delivered out of prison by the angel of the Lord.

[28 : 18] He thinks it's a dream, but once he's out, he finally realizes, no, I'm out of prison. So he goes to where the church is gathered together praying, and he knocks on the door, and the servant girl comes to the door and says, ah, it's Peter.

And she goes and tells everybody, shut it up, open the gate. They're like, open the gate. Let him in. And the people don't believe her. Like, no, no, that's not Peter. That's his angel. You know, I don't know what the thought was there.

They're praying earnestly. I believe they were probably praying with faith. Maybe the timing of it surprised them. Maybe the answer surprised them. Maybe, you know, James had just been executed. And so maybe they thought, Lord, if that's your will for Peter too, so be it.

But here's Peter at the door, the answer to their prayer. So, even when you pray together, it may not always be with the greatest faith. You might have the wrong response sometimes when the answer comes. But the church is praying together.

Notice that in verse 12. When he realized this, that he really was out of prison, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

[29 : 22] I don't know if that's the same praying the church was doing in verse 5 or a later prayer meeting or they're still praying, whatever it is, but they are gathered together praying. Alright? There's not a command to do it, but there's the example of it.

What's the early church doing? They're praying together and God answers their prayer. Do you, the individual, make corporate prayer a priority so that you all, the body, have the opportunity to pray fervently for the needs facing the church?

Maybe something as urgent as this. Maybe something less urgent. The early church did. And the church today should as well.

You can pray for matters in your own church. You can pray for somebody that's in trouble like Peter was. You can pray for your sister churches, the church abroad, the persecuted church.

One of the reasons the Grace Baptist Church in Warsaw exists is because you all prayed. So I really do want to encourage you. I don't want to beat you up tonight. I thank you for praying. Your prayers together are one of the reasons that Grace Fellowship Church in Bremen is still here and that Grace Baptist Church in Warsaw exists at all and is still there.

[30 : 33] It's because you all have prayed together. You're to be commended. God has heard and answered your prayers. I just want to encourage you to see that you're doing the right thing when you do that by God's grace.

Thank you for your prayers. Acts 13 verses 1-3 They're sending Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

Acts 13-3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. What did they do? What do you think they prayed when they prayed for Paul and Barnabas laid their hands on them and sent them off?

Well, I think Acts 14 tells us. Come to the end of Acts 14. You find out at the end of the missionary journey what they prayed at the beginning. Verse 26 They're wrapping up their journey.

From there they sailed to Antioch where they had been commended to the grace of God. I think that's what they prayed for back in Acts 13 and verse 3. What did they pray? We're going to commend you, Paul and Barnabas, to the grace of God.

[31 : 34] Lord, we commend them to your grace. Bless them on their mission. Establish churches. Save sinners. Bless their work. We are putting them in your hands, Lord. Bless them as they go. They were commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled.

Verse 27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them and now he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. You know what that means? It means God answered their prayers. And we're not going to take the time tonight, but you can look through Acts chapter 13 at various points and see that they succeeded.

Sinners being saved. Churches being established. Elders being appointed in those churches. God answered the prayers. They're sending out missionaries and they don't just say, see ya! Good luck!

Hope it goes! They commended them to the grace of God. They prayed together for them. As should we when we send out church planters or missionaries. Again, you've done that.

[32 : 33] Continue. Excel still more in it. Because when we pray for such missionaries, church planters, we're commending them to the grace of God. And here we see God answered the prayer. The spread of the church in Acts 13. That first missionary journey was what we would call a smashing success. They would have some great prayer letters to write home. They could talk about being persecuted.

They could talk about sinners coming and coming to Christ. They could talk about churches being established and elders being appointed in the church. We would be we would do it. We would be doing back flips if we got a prayer letter like that from a missionary.

It's amazing. And it started as they prayed together in Acts 13. 1-3. And when they get back, they say, we commended. You commended us to the grace of God and here's what He did.

The growth of the early church in Acts is directly tied to the people of God, the church, praying together. prayer. That should be fuel for our prayer.

[33 : 35] Do we want people to believe? Disciples to be raised up and strengthened. Elders to be raised up in the churches. Yes! What should we do to that end? We must, in prayer, together, commend our plans to God.

Our efforts to God. Commended all to God and His grace if we would expect them to succeed. I hope you take seriously that role of the church in the life of the church praying together.

Again, I know that you do. Be encouraged to continue in that work. Brothers and sisters, we shouldn't expect God's blessing on our efforts to support missionaries or reach our community or to see sinners saved.

We shouldn't expect blessing if we aren't corporately praying regarding those things. Now, again, I know that you as a church are, but if you as an individual are not part of that, why not?

Gather together with God's people and commend the labors of Grace Fellowship Church to God and beg Him for success in them. May God give you grace to continue doing that.

[34 : 41] The early church prayed together and the church prospered and grew. They found what Jesus said to be true. Matthew 18, 19, and 20, 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.

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. See how Jesus, in the context of talking about the church, expects them to be praying together and agreeing together. and that's what you find His disciples doing in the early church. Asking, and He promises the Father will answer.

You ever thought about this? So there's, there's, there's, the blessing of answered prayer. Have you thought about the flip side of the danger of a lack of prayer? Remember what Jesus said to the, the, the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane?

Matthew 26, 40 and 41, and He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, so you could not watch with Me one hour, watch and pray. And interestingly enough, that pray is in the plural too.

[35 : 47] He's got His three closest disciples with Him and He says, watch and pray. You all, pray, that you may not enter into temptation. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. And what happened? Well, they slept some more and they fell into temptation. They deserted their Savior when they should have stood with Him. Might they have better stood by their Master instead of abandoning Him had they been praying as Jesus called them to do? I don't know. Maybe. But, just notice that Jesus doesn't view prayer or the lack of it as without consequence.

Watch and pray so that you may not enter into temptation. The implication is you will enter into temptation if you don't watch and pray. There's consequences to not praying together as the people of God.

Praying individually as well. Focusing on corporate prayer. Tonight, there's consequences to not doing it. So there's the benefit of answered prayer and great blessing for the church. Alright?

Benefit of obedience.

[36 : 57] Benefit of answered prayers we see very clearly in the early church. And lastly, the benefit of bearing one another's burdens. Mutual encouragement. It is such an encouragement and advantage in gathering together to pray.

If you don't, you are missing great blessing that could be coming your way. Encouragement that comes from being a part of a gathering as we bear one another's burdens. Turn with me to Romans 12 for a moment.

Amen. Amen. This passage describes the beauty and blessing of being part of a community of believers, the body of Christ.

He even uses that illustration of the body earlier in the chapter. We're members of the same body. And as you read through Romans 12, and I want to read verses 9 through 16, these are commands for us to do.

But I want you to think about being, as we think about the blessing of mutual encouragement and the blessing of bearing one another's burdens, I want you to think about being on the receiving end of someone who is following these commands.

[38 : 09] If your brothers and sisters in Christ are living out Romans 12, what does that mean for you? You have permission to be selfish for a moment, alright? Not sinfully selfish, but think about the implications of this for you if you were on the receiving end of this.

Okay? Romans 12, verses 9 through 16. And we'll stop down at verse 16. Let love be genuine.

Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation.

Be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Goes on. Repay no one evil for evil and live peaceably with all as far as it depends on you.

[39 : 16] If you're in a true community of believers who's living out Romans chapter 12, you will be loved.

You'll receive brotherly affection. You'll be shown honor. You'll receive contribution for your needs.

You'll receive blessing. People will rejoice with and weep with you.

And they will pray with you. And they will pray for you. So in this passage, full of one another, you notice that we're exhorted to be constant, plural, in prayer.

Verse 12. That's part of the community of great encouragement and blessing. It's a community that prays. And what a blessing it is to be prayed for by brothers and sisters in Christ.

And I'm going to say just at an experiential level. Okay? This is not Scripture. But to sit in a prayer meeting with great need and to hear your brothers and sisters praying, bringing your name specifically before the throne of grace and knowing that the people in that room are joining their hearts together for you in prayer.

[40 : 28] That's sweet. That's spirit lifting. You can come to prayer meeting greatly burdened and when you walk out, the burden is still there.

But you've experienced people sticking their shoulder under that burden with you and walking with you. That's one of the great things that you're missing if you're not gathering together with God's people in prayer is hearing them pray for you.

And then the flip side, now you can't be selfish anymore. You doing that for them. You bearing their burden with them. That's how the body of Christ is supposed to work, brothers and sisters.

And one of the most tangible expressions, obvious ways to do that, to be the body of Christ, is to pray for one another. Do it in your prayer closets. Do it on your own.

But come together and do it. And shoulder those burdens together. Galatians 6.2 Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

[41 : 33] That's what we do when we gather for prayer. That's what the church, and again, Romans 12 seems so clear. This is the context of the body of Christ doing that together.

And our experience is that doing it is a sweet blessing. Privilege to be born before the throne of grace and to bear others in their burdens before that throne. So you gather on your Wednesday nights.

You get to hear deep trials and great triumphs and pray and weep and rejoice all in the same evening sometimes. It's part of the nature of true fellowship.

Truly sharing in one another's lives. If you're missing that, you're missing a key blessing in the life of the church together. Hebrews 10 exhorts us to that. To not forsake assembling together.

And when you do that, what are you doing? You're stirring one another up to love and good works. Part of that is praying for one another. James 5 and 16. Verse 16 says, Therefore confess, plural, your sins to one another and pray for one another.

[42 : 37] It sounds like you're together when you're doing that. That you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it's working. You're missing real blessing and encouragement in the life of the church if you're not praying together with God's people.

Am I promising you that every time you gather together for prayer it's going to be an amazing emotional experience and you're going to be on a mountaintop when you walk out? No. It won't always be that way. And part of the blessing is sometimes when it's not that way is enduring through the slog.

It can be a slog sometimes. I admit it. That's why I still need work in corporate prayer. Part of the blessing is coming out on the other side and knowing that even though it may not have felt like it did that one Wednesday night that God still met with you and heard you and is answering your prayers. We need this regularly in an ongoing way just like we do in other relationships. We need to be together with someone that we have a relationship with.

We want that relationship to flourish and grow. So it is with God and with one another. You might have some objections tonight but I hope you see these three benefits.

[43 : 46] The benefit of obedience, the benefit of answered prayer, and the benefit of mutual encouragement are all reasons that we ought to be praying together. You might say, but yep, no direct command to pray together.

I hope you see it so woven into the fabric of the church that it's inescapable and it's expected. If you object, there's no command to have a prayer meeting. Okay. But in addition to gathering for worship, that's the avenue that Grace Fellowship Church has chosen to express that obvious reality of corporate prayer in the life of our church.

And we all need to be a part of it. Is it really that big of a deal? Is it really that big of a problem? Surely you don't miss me at prayer meeting. There's other people there that each of the church are being prayed for. Even if I'm not there, you guys are still, you just said, you're gathering together for prayer.

I know that you do and maybe you guys are really encouraged. I hope you are with your prayer meeting. Your attendance at it. Praise God if that's the case. But actually, the church does need you there.

Don't assume that everyone else is there doing the heavy lifting. There are no unnecessary parts in the body. And the church needs you doing your part. We need to pray together, brothers and sisters.

[44 : 54] And again, I don't want to beat you up. I really don't know the state of your prayer meeting. It's been a long time since I've been to one. I hope it's healthy and thriving. I hope this is just a, dude, we're good. Like, you didn't need to, you didn't need to hit us over the head tonight.

Praise God. But if you do need encouragement to it tonight, receive it. Receive the challenge. I know it's hard. I know it's hard with small children.

I know you're tired in the middle of the week on a Wednesday night. I understand you're busy. I understand you have other things to do. I understand it might not always feel that beneficial to you. You tried it. You didn't get that much out of it.

But here's the thing, friends. We make a way to do the things that we believe are important. We find a way to make it work. We just do. If we think it's important, we'll do it. I think eating's important. And I do it. Every day. We find a way. And I pray you'll do that with corporate prayer. Is it a priority for you? Is it enough of a priority to make it a point to pray together with God's people?

[45 : 56] Understand there may be legitimate reasons that keep you from it. That's not what I'm talking about tonight. But I encourage Grace Fellowship Church to watch and pray lest you enter into temptation.

You want great things for your church. growth and outreach and effective ministry and conversions and baptisms. Could it be that you haven't joined together with the church and praying together as you ought for these things?

I hope you'll think about it. And if you find yourself lacking in your conscience prick tonight, don't just say, I'm going to show up and show up one week and then make a plan. Long-term plan so that you'll persevere and continue in.

Not just like, yeah, I'm going to come and then trickles off again. Have a plan by God's grace. And if you're not regularly praying together with God's people, why not?

There's so many good reasons to do so and so few good reasons to not do so. If corporate prayer isn't a priority in your life, it should be. I hope you've seen that from the scriptures tonight.

[46 : 55] And if it is, I hope you're reinforced in your conviction regarding it. I hope you see that there's very good reason for us to do so. Even if it's hard. Even if it's tiresome. Press on. Thank you for praying.

Thank you for praying for our church. The fact that I'm still standing here preaching tonight is a testament to your prayers for us. It's all God's grace and answers to prayer.

Thank you. Excel still more. Continue on. Our Savior Jesus, the death of death and hell's destruction, He died and He gave Himself up for the church.

So in service to our glorious Savior, we die to self and give of ourselves for the good of His church in prayer together. Pray that God will make it so. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for this privilege that we are engaged in at this moment of praying together as your people. Thank you for this church that does pray together. Encourage them to grow still more and to continue to pursue that corporate life of prayer together that they might find mutual encouragement, that you might hear and answer their prayers for this church and your blessing on it and that we might know the blessing of being obedient to your commands.

[48 : 11] And so come and do Grace Fellowship Church good as they pray together, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.