

The Dearest Place on Earth (12)

A Praying Community

A. Introduction

1. The local church is a community of God's people.

2. What kind of community should we be?

When people look at this local church what should they see?

3. As well as seeing a worshipping community, they should also see a praying community.

B. What is prayer?

1. Prayer is... (defining prayer).

Prayer is made up of three things: Someone listening (God), someone speaking (us), the words that are spoken.

"Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth." (Psalm 54:2)

2. Prayer is a privilege.

We can talk to God as His children.

We can talk to God knowing that He hears us and answers us.

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." (1 John 5:13-14)

3. Prayer is a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence in a person's life.

"The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying." (Acts 9:11)

4. Prayer is a priority.

We are commanded to pray.

"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Prayer shows our dependence upon God.

Prayer glorifies God.

"And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father." (John 14:13)

5. Prayer is a problem.

"I doubt if there is any Christian who has not sometimes found it difficult to pray." (Don Carson)

"Oh, if I could only pray the way this dog watches the meat! All his thoughts are concentrated on the piece of meat. Otherwise he has no thought, wish or hope." (Martin Luther)

C. Why should we want to pray?

1. We pray to the God who we love.

"It is not that God receives new data through our prayers, but that through our prayers information is clothed in love making it communication. God has ordained that he will be affected by our loving communication to him." (Tim Chester)

2. We pray to the God who is willing and able.

Our God is willing.

"The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made." (Psalm 145:13)

"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:9-11)

Our God is able.

"Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done." (Matthew 21:21)

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." (Ephesians 3:20)

3. We pray to the God who really does answer prayers.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

"You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God." (James 4:2)

D. How should we pray?

1. Like a child in how we pray.

We pray in Jesus' name.

"And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:13-14)

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit —fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." (John 15:16)

We should pray according to God's Will.

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." (1 John 5:13-14)

We should pray in the Spirit.

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." (Ephesians 6:18)

We should pray in faith.

"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." (Matthew 21:22)

We should pray from a pure heart.

"Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him." (1 John 3:21-22)

2. Like a child in what we pray.

We ask.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7)

We praise.

"Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom." (Psalm 145:2-3)

We thank.

"...always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:20)

We confess.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

We complain.

"I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out my complaint before him; before him I tell my trouble." (Psalm 142:1-2)

E. Praying Together

1. What has happened to the weekly prayer meeting?

From the time of the early church, prayer has been at the centre of church life and its weekly programme.

If there is any part of church life that seems to be in trouble – it's the prayer meeting – with a decline both in interest and attendance.

"The mid-week prayer meeting has largely been lost in the contest for a slot in the weekly schedule when people are free to attend. Everything else seems more important. The old time mid-weekly prayer routines are not sacred... but proclamation and prayer are at the heart of the Saviour's program for His church. They dare not be laid aside. If we have scheduled them out we must again schedule them in. The forms may change, but the essentials must not be neglected and lost."
(Robert Duncan Calver)

"We shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general until the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians." (Charles Spurgeon)

2. Why don't churches pray together?

People find it boring.

People don't believe that prayer works.

People are put off by long prayers.

People don't feel comfortable praying aloud.

People don't consider it to be a priority.

3. In the Bible we see God's people constantly gathering together to pray.

The people of Israel prayed together.

"During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God." (Exodus 2:23)

"And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped." (Exodus 4:31)

"Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD." (Exodus 15:1)

The first Christians prayed together.

"Then they returned 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 Simon 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." (Acts 1:12-14)

"They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

"On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. 'Sovereign Lord, they said, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.'... After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." (Acts 4:23-24, 31)

"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him... When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying." (Acts 12:5, 12)

4. Jesus encouraged His followers to pray together.

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:19-20)

5. The benefits of prayer together.

It brings us together – as we come to God and pray for and with one another, our minds are taken off ourselves and our natural selfishness, and we focus on someone else and their needs.

It unites us – we join together in praying for God's glory, the good of the church, and the conversion of unbelievers.

It demonstrates our dependence upon God.

F. The whole church praying together

1. There are two opportunities each week for the whole church to pray together.

The Pastoral Prayer during the morning service.

The Midweek Prayer Meeting.

2. Will we pray together? Will you make the midweek prayer meeting a priority?