

## Thought 7<sup>th</sup> March 2021

During the last two weeks as we looked at Paul's letter to Philemon, and we have thought about how we relate to each other as believers in Jesus and how we fit into the family of God as brothers and sisters in Christ.

This week we are going to start to look at prayer before we move on to look at Paul's letter to the Colossians after Easter.

Prayer is, sadly an area of struggle and guilt for many believers. We all know we should pray but we don't and when we eventually get around to praying, we are unsure what to pray. So next week we are going to think about our own prayer life and see what God's thoughts are on the how and why of personal prayer and you just might be surprised.

However, this morning we are going to look at something even more difficult and possibly confusing for many and that is praying together.

This morning we are going to look at what the benefits of praying together are. We are going to look at how praying together opens the door to God's Spirit moving in our times together and how praying together builds each other's faith.

We heard in our reading this morning about the Church praying for Peter's release from jail. This is an amazing literal outworking of our call to worship *"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."*

The believers prayed, agreed and Peter was miraculously freed from jail. The account as well as being dramatic and encouraging also has great humour in it. We read that Peter turns up at John's mums house and can't get in because they refuse to accept it is him. I often imagine the scene where Rhoda breaks into the prayer meeting as they are energetically and loudly praying away. I can imagine someone saying, "don't

be ridiculous we haven't finished praying, God is going to wait for us to finish before He releases Peter!"

Praying together not only invites the presence and power of the Holy Spirit into situations and people's lives in the world around us, praying together also invites the Holy Spirit to move in power in our times together.

There is a different atmosphere in churches that pray together and who have a group of praying believers. Worship seems more powerful. There is a sense of connection with God that is not there in churches where believers do not gather to pray together.

We have all, I am sure been in services in which there is little evidence of the presence or power of the Holy Spirit. Often, we often bemoan the fact that we didn't experience the presence or power of the Holy Spirit. Why don't we experience the presence or power of the Holy Spirit? Well maybe our times together was so crowded with us that we have crowded God's presence out.

Rather profoundly I heard it said, "The moving of the Holy Spirit in the midst of a church is directly proportional to the amount of prayer that takes place there." Why is this so? Because as we pray together, we focus more on God and less on ourselves. As we focus on God, we make space for His Holy Spirit to break into our times together in a powerful way.

When the Spirit of God is manifestly present, believers can experience God giving them direction and encouragement. The church in Antioch saw this truth in action **Acts 13: 2 - 3** *"While they were worshiping the Lord praying and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'* So, *after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off".* During a normal time of worship, the Holy Spirit gave crucial direction that forever changed the world—Saul (Paul) began his missionary work.

As we pray together as a fellowship, God will begin to "show up" more and more. As we pray together, we will see God move both within the fellowship and in the world beyond.

Another benefit of praying together is it strengthens and increases our faith that God can and will do the miraculous.

Matthew 17 and Mark 9 tell the story of a father who brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples. They could not cast the demon out. The boy was taken to Jesus, who issued a simple command and the demon left. Remember this account takes place after Jesus had sent them out two by two into villages to casting out demons and heal the sick. The disciples were puzzled by their failure the disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't cast out the demon.

Jesus said two things: "because you have so little faith" (Matthew 17:20), and "this kind can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:29).

So why did the disciples struggle to cast out the demon? Well, from Jesus' response it appears they hadn't prayed and therefore lacked the faith to drive the demon out. It is striking that faith seems to increase and be strengthened by people praying together.

Jesus sent the disciples out in twos for many reasons but one of the most important was so that they could pray together to strengthen and increase each other's faith. It was this strengthening of each other's faith that enabled them to be able to do all Jesus had commanded them, including to cast out demons. Perhaps in this instance the disciples just jumped in without praying together and when it came to it, they simply lacked the faith to cast the demon out.

So how does praying together strengthen our faith. Well, here are some simple ways:

When we pray together and give thanks to God for what He has done in our lives it strengthens others' faith. Giving thanks to God demonstrates how God has moved in our lives and strengthens and increases other people's faith that God will move in their lives in a similar way.

When we pray together and share our struggles and pain this too strengthens others' faith. When we are struggling and in pain, we can believe that our situation is unique

and we are alone. This is one of the devil's particular favourites ploys to isolate and convince those who are struggling that they are particularly sinful or their struggles are because they deserve them. This condemnation drives us to feeling alone and isolated and our faith can wither. Yet when we pray together and discover that our brothers and sisters in Christ suffer from many of the same struggles as we do, we realise that we are not alone. We realise that just as they have faith that God is helping them in their struggles, we can have faith that God will help us in our struggles and our faith is strengthened and increases.

When we pray together and someone prays one of those great prayers of faith asking God to change the world this can encourage others faith. Perhaps we couldn't honestly pray such a prayer because our faith just isn't that big. But we can join our faith to theirs and say Amen, let it be. Their faith that God will do the miraculous strengthens and increases our faith to believe that God will work in miraculous way.

Praying together is a place of power and agreement, *"Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven."*

Praying together strengthens and increases our faith and the faith of others. It is an expression of Koinonia, an activity of the family of God. Praying together is about caring and sharing, serving and being served but most of all praying together is about the family of God, brothers and sisters in Christ hanging out with Abba our heavenly father.