

The Power of Praying with Others

Series: Connecting with God in Prayer

March 6, 2016 – Brad Bailey

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1. We are _____ afresh in the common place and nature that _____ us.

Matthew 6:9-13

2. We _____ from the spiritual gifts, insight, and example of others.

3. We find _____ in uniting around the will and work of God.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12 (GW)

Two people are better than one because together they have a good reward for their hard work. ¹⁰ If one falls, the other can help his friend get up. But how tragic it is for the one who is alone when he falls. There is no one to help him get up. ...¹² Though one person may be overpowered by another, two people can resist one opponent. A triple-braided rope is not easily broken.

Matthew 18:19-20 (CEV)

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Intro

Here's a question to reflect on for a moment: When you go through hard times...do you tend to want to be alone...or connect with others?

For most of us...there is **probably a mixture of both**...there can be **something so personal** that we feel we need to engage a very **deep place within ourselves**.

But at the same time...we can feel **alone**...and **vulnerable left only to our own strength**....so we also desire to share in what we face.

This is what we see in Jesus as he knew that the powers of this world would soon seek to destroy him. **As we reflect upon that final week**... we can only begin to imagine what Jesus felt as he was **heading toward the climatic confrontation with the powers of this world**. The time has come...there is no holding back the confrontation... people are buzzing... leaders are plotting. Sunday...he arrives in Jerusalem...as huge crowds...pour out... for the people have begun to consider that he is the messiah...the one who would save them. Then that first night he heads to his friend's home in nearby Bethany...the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus... there with his disciples... he found both space and strength for what was unfolding . He stayed there each night...and then on Thursday...he tells his disciples to prepare for a Passover meal together. And as that night went on...he declares that the time has come...and he walks through the city pathways down to the garden at Gethsemane. ...AND he asks them to go **with him**. [1]

There was something deeply personal that has to be resolved within his spirit....BUT that decision could be shared with others. The Garden represents something deeply personal....but not separated from others.

And that is the truth we do well to recognize:

Every battle bears something personal...but also something shared with others.

He was always drawing them into what he saw and the battle faced because in some way...it was their battle to. They would face their own opposition...and he warned them...:If their Master faced opposition they should be prepared to face the same.”

So as we continue our focus on “connecting with God in Prayer”... today we hear God's call to pray together.

For some...nothing seems more natural.

For others... perhaps we are more private in nature. Sometimes we become notably private... hesitant to share anything personal...because we experienced a world that wasn't emotionally safe. That may be something to face...and find our way beyond so that we don't become bound by such a past. Others may be hesitant to pray with others because we just don't know how to relate to people so different than us... they may seem too strange...weird. I've been in some pretty interesting groups of lives... awkward...yet how often I actually found God was there still... and sometimes... in a very special way. And perhaps some of are just given to our sense of strength in being independent.

It's a theme of super heroes. Super heroes are often loners... those who tend to go it alone...we want them to join up...but it's never easy. I think it reflects something about our whole idea of strength... toughness is reflected in going it alone... **but if the stakes are epic...the true hero is the one who proves they can work as a team player. They realize that they are faced with something bigger than themselves.**

And so it is that we find the Scriptures revealing how when faced with the greatest challenges...God's people came together in prayer...and we see the power of joining in prayer.
[2]

- The 120 were gathered in an upper room praying in one accord when Pentecost comes (Acts 1:13; 2:1).
- The disciples prayed for wisdom in knowing who Judas' replacement should be (Acts 1:24).
- When Peter and John reported the Sanhedrin's threats, those gathered cried out to God in one accord for boldness, and the place was shaken where they prayed (Acts 4:24, 31).
- The church prayed over the seven men appointed to serve the widows (Acts 6:6).
- After James was martyred and Peter imprisoned by Herod, but the church was fervently praying, and God miraculously delivered Peter from his cell (Acts 12:1-11).

Let's quickly consider the power of praying together.

When we pray with others...

1. We are rooted afresh in the common place and nature that unites us.

We often can feel so different from others... because outwardly we are ...even circumstantially we are. We may think that no one can understand our workplace dynamics...our financial dynamics...our marital dynamics...our family dynamics...our loneliness. But when we pray... we transcend those often secondary differences...and find ourselves rooted in what we share in common at the core. We are engaging issues that are fundamental to us all.

How did Jesus teach us to pray?

Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV)

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"**OUR** Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give **US** today **OUR** daily bread.

¹² Forgive **US OUR** debts,

as **WE** also have forgiven **OUR** debtors.

¹³ And lead **US** not into temptation,
but deliver **US** from the evil one.'

Did you notice all the plurals—”our,” “us,” “we”? In providing a model prayer for his disciples, Jesus puts it in a form that commends it for corporate use. The prayer naturally lends itself to group prayer because of its using “our” instead of “my.” Even praying the Lord’s prayer privately—which is fine to do—will remind you that you are praying as part of a family of other believers. The Lord’s Prayer is an invitation not only to pray but to pray together with other believers.

When we declare “OUR” Father... we are at once recognizing that there is a common source of life that can be known in common.

When we declare “OUR” Father... it is locating us as one who shares a common life with others... a common bond by which we belong.

We were created to be connected.

“Even though we are many individuals, Christ makes us one body and individuals who are connected to each other.” Romans 12:5 (GW)

When we declare “OUR” Father... we are identifying that we are not alone in the process of becoming like Him. And it rescues us from the isolation that draws us into the darkness.

2. We grow from the spiritual gifts, insight, and example of others.

The simple truth is that we don’t grow well alone...and we certainly don’t learn how to do something that is that is new to us without drawing from others.

Do you know how you learned to eat...to talk...to read... to play a sport? It was something you learned by watching others...by working with others.

The first time we do things often is marked by fear...discomfort...but it is not a sign that we should not be doing this...but just that we need to gain experience...and we gain experience best with others.

Learning to pray can be awkward...praying out loud... after all...it is profound to be a finite creature engaging the infinite Creator.

But we grow through the insight and examples of others. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray...it wasn’t because they didn’t know how to pray at all...but because they wanted to expand what they had understood...and to enter into the dynamic that Jesus lived in.

First time...knelt in prayer...was when gathered with others. The first time I fasted...was with others. And I still grow from the spiritual gifts...insights...and example of others.

And since the great point of **prayer is not getting things from God, but getting God**, this is the reward we can get whenever we have an opportunity to pray with others.

Similarly,

3. We find strength in uniting around the will and work of God.

Let me offer this description of prayer again:

Prayer is the active, ongoing, redirecting of my spirit to the will and work of God.

Prayer is doing something that is both simple and hard...natural and often not natural. It's telling that in that garden on that fateful night, Jesus found his disciples sleeping... And explained that "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." It won't always come naturally or easily. He seems to be affirming that there our spirits will often have to rise beyond what is natural. And when we pray with others...it can help us.

In every realm of life...there is vulnerability in isolation...and the strength that comes from being joined with others. The great King Solomon... noted for seeking wisdom above all...and God giving it... wrote in Ecclesiastes...

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12 (GW)

*Two people are better than one because together they have a good reward for their hard work.
¹⁰ If one falls, the other can help his friend get up. But how tragic it is for the one who is alone when he falls. There is no one to help him get up. ...¹² Though one person may be overpowered by another, two people can resist one opponent. A triple-braided rope is not easily broken.*

We all need to hear the Wisdom of Solomon in these words.

It's in being joined with others that we find...

- **Success** – a better reward for our work
- **Sustainability** – the encouragement that lifts us when we fall
- **Strength** – to stand against the forces that oppose us... like a rope woven together.

This is certainly **true of our connection with God in prayer.**

There will be **times when we become weary.** ... when we just want to sit down and give up. Yet, if a friend labors with you, he will lift you up. When attacks come, a friend can make a stand with you. Where it may seem hopeless alone, I can **draw off a friend's strength** and he off mine. God did not design us to stand alone.

God's plan is to be interdependent - not independent.

And so it was that **when the early church faced the most...they joined in prayer together.**

As one man described it...it's **like a full court press in basketball.**

The usual practice in a basketball game is to allow the offensive team to get halfway down the court (which is called a half-court press) or wait til the other team is near the basket before applying strong defensive pressure. But THIS tactic (the "full court press") involves "pressing" the other team "the entire length of the court."

Now... I've watched basketball games and you can feel the intensity when a team begins to put on a full court press. If it's a televised game... the announcers will become edgy and imply that the team with the ball could be in trouble if they can't get the ball down the court rapidly. It's the nature of pressing...the sense of confrontation rises as the time is short.

**Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane was such a press.
It was just BEFORE His time of praying at Gethsemane that Jesus told His disciples:
"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death..." Mark 14:34**

There he was in that garden referred to as "Gethsemane." How notable that the word means "Oil PRESS."

Gethsemane was an Olive Grove. And olive oil was a very precious commodity. Ancient peoples would use oil presses like the ones pictured here to crush the olives. The olives would be placed in large round stone basins like the one we see here, and then they'd be "crushed" by another large round stone that was rotated around the basin by oxen or other domesticated animals.

**But this time, Jesus takes Peter, James and John into the heart of the garden with Him
It's fairly obvious that He desires... He expects... He needs them to pray with Him.
This was a time when He felt the need to have His friends join Him in His struggle.**

The nature of a full court press is that it requires more than one player to make it effective.

Jesus had said to them...and by way of them to us...

Matthew 18:19-20 (CEV)

I promise that when any two of you on earth agree about something you are praying for, my Father in heaven will do it for you. Whenever two or three of you come together in my name, I am there with you.

There is power in agreement...and when we align ourselves with God's will and work... Christ is uniquely among us. [3]

CLOSING (with (Group Prayer)...An opportunity to enjoy this gift. Break up into small groups of 3-4 people, and take a few minutes to pray with one another.

- Now I know that some here may not be comfortable praying...perhaps still just trying to know God...perhaps very private.
- I want to encourage you...you don't have to pray out loud...you can just agree in your spirit with others...but also that you CAN pray out loud...you do have a sense of a need...and you can speak to that.
- You learn to pray by praying....Pray as you can, not as you can't
 - Consider...One person whose need God puts on your heart

And / Or

One situation (personal or shared with others) that you want to seek God's will and work in.

Jesus passionately declared that his Father's house was to be "a house of prayer." (Matthew 21:13.) Let's enjoy being a house of prayer.

Resources: Jeff Strite (Drew analogy of "full court press"); David Bubb (Drew idea of Christ's prayer in John 17 as good points for our prayer for the church.)

Notes:

1. It should be noted that Jesus' followers clearly failed at "keeping watch"...which appears to have included prayer...because Jesus addresses their failure "to pray." Furthermore, he seemed to clearly need space for personal prayer as he "went ahead of them." Yet the value of sharing this with others is clear as 1) he invited them to come...with a clear need for their support, 2) even takes his closest three closer to himself, 3) told them that they will share in what he faces. So while it could be an example of a group prayer time that "went bad"...it reflects how Christ sought to share this time. [[Matthew 26:36-46](#) [Luke 22:39-46](#) [Mark 14:32-42](#)]

-captures the mix...he goes to pray along separate from them...they keep falling asleep...so would either need to only describe his taking them in general...or backtrack humorously from the incident...which may be hard.]

2. We find other examples of God's people joining in prayer...

- While the prophets and teachers were praying and fasting, the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to go on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-2).
- Paul and Silas were praying when God sent an earthquake that resulted in the conversion of the jailer and their release (Acts 16:25).
- Consider the example in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11
"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many."

There are very significant examples of God moving in personal prayer - Ananias was praying alone when God instructed him to go to Saul (Acts 9:10ff.). Peter was alone on the rooftop when he had his famous vision leading him to share the Gospel with a Gentile named Cornelius (Acts 10:9ff.). But we find that many great movements came when His people prayed together.

3. The context of Christ's statement is that of disciplining one who will not respond to the community. Jesus said that if you have a brother who sins against you, then you need to go to him and try to work it out. If he refuses to acknowledge his fault, then you bring one or two more witnesses to help work things out. So including you, that would make *two or three witnesses*— Not only is it repeated in these verses, but it comes from the Old Testament ([Deuteronomy 19:15](#) and more). Legal cases needed to have two or three witnesses to establish a matter.