

"Partners By Prayer"

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[0 : 00] You'll find it in the Pew Bibles on page 1774. I want to say that it's been a privilege to get to preach to you a number of times so far, and once again I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to continue preaching to you through this book.

I have been deeply blessed personally by the time spent in the Word preparing these messages, and considering how to best love you as a congregation.

So thank you for this opportunity. In thinking of this passage, it reminded me of what it would feel like to be part of a major blockbuster movie, or perhaps a major motion picture with a budget of a few hundred million dollars that will be seen by millions of people around the world.

It would be nice to get to be part of this, maybe not playing a major role, but even just enough to have my name in the credits would be special.

I'd expect that most of us would be excited to have such a possibility, to get to be part of this huge, amazing thing, to get to see your name up there on the big screen with everyone else, to have a sense that I was part of making that happen.

[1 : 34] We naturally understand that it is a special thing to be part of big events, to play some role in the bringing about of something spectacular.

Well, last week in our study, we considered how God is a great deliverer, how he delights in showing his power by raising the dead, by bringing life out of death, and how he uses suffering to wean us from trust in ourselves and in this world, and to point us towards trust in him.

Well, in this week's passage, Paul speaks on how the Corinthians can partner with God in God's great works of deliverance, and that they can work out that partnership by praying for him.

This passage is an example for us, that by prayer we partner with God in his great works. This is a special and honorable opportunity.

May we fully appreciate the privilege that is captured here of partnering with God. Read with me in 2 Corinthians 1, verses 8-11.

[2 : 57] The text we're focusing on today will be that last verse, verse number 11. For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened beyond measure and above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us, in whom we trust that he will still deliver us, in the verse we study today, you also, helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf, for the gift granted to us through memory, through many.

After declaring his trust to be placed squarely in the God who delivers, Paul says, in whom, that is God, we trust that he will still deliver us, you also helping us together in prayer.

In this passage is working out a piece of the Bible's doctrine of prayer, and of our union with Christ and one another.

When we pray, the Bible reveals to us that we are active participants in the plans of God. We are workers with God, and we share in his great world-shaping plans.

[4 : 40] This is like the great honor of getting your name on that big screen, but even greater. And we can share in this, we can do this because everyone who is a believer, is united with God.

The Holy Spirit binds us to Christ and to each other, forming one body with Christ as the head.

So, we can partner with God by prayer, because the Holy Spirit unites us to God and to each other. But the passage does not end there.

It also lays out the purpose and the benefits of this unity through prayer, this partnership together. It continues on to say, you also helping us together in prayer, that, that, pay attention when you read

words like that, they show us how to connect the thoughts of the Bible together.

So, Paul is talking about working together in prayer, and then he talks about the purpose and the result of it, by saying, that, that we may, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf, for the gift granted to us through many.

[6 : 09] The result of this prayer is that many get to participate together in the works of God, and then get to share in the gratitude and rejoicing when God delivers.

Not if he delivers, but when. That by partnering together, we also get to rejoice together. I would summarize the message today in this way.

When we pray, we partner together with God and with his people. Therefore, we should share our sufferings.

We should pray for each other. Then we will be able to rejoice together in God. Once again, this summary.

When we pray together, we partner with God and with his people. Therefore, we should share our sufferings, pray for each other, and then we will be able to rejoice together in God.

[7 : 15] That will be our outline today. Four points. Partner with God and his people. That's point one. Point two will be share in suffering. Point three is pray for one another.

And point four will be rejoice together. Point number one. Partner with God and with his people. While this passage isn't explaining much about the unity we enjoy as believers with God and with each other, it is a concept that, a biblical concept that undergirds and supports this passage and the purpose that Paul is making.

In our natural states, before salvation, we are enemies of God. Even if we acknowledge him a bit in our lives, we live in rebellion against him.

If you put God anywhere other than the central throne of your life, having command and rule over everything you do, you have despised him and dethroned him, making yourself an enemy.

But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our sins and trespasses, made us alive together in Christ.

[8 : 39] That is, that God sent his son Jesus to live a perfect life and to die for the sins of those who would believe in him. Because we are rebels and enemies of God deserve death, Jesus died in our stead, a rebel's death, so that whoever believes in him might be made alive again.

Then once our sins are paid for by Jesus' death, we find that we are reconciled to God. Colossians 1 verses 19 and 20, For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

We are reconciled to God in Christ. Peace is made between us. That is, that when we repent and trust in him, we are united with Christ and with the Trinity in a marriage-like relationship.

We are made one with them. We have a partnership in a unity. Our sins become Christ's, so that he can pay for them, and his riches become ours, that we may be able to enter heaven and enjoy the love and favor of God.

But when we are united with Christ by faith, we are also united with each other. This vertical reconciliation between man and God also brings about horizontal reconciliation between man and man.

[10 : 30] That is, that when God brings us to himself, he also brings us to each other. Romans 12 verses 4 and 5, For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function.

So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another. We are one body together with one head who is Christ.

We who have been united to God are also united to each other. Jesus himself prays that this would be the case.

The passage that Mary read for us so wonderfully today in John 17 was a prayer of Jesus with a major theme of unity between the people of God and God.

We read in John 17, I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

[11 : 57] The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them, and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me, and love them, even as you love me.

This is a precious truth that we are united with God, and then made one together. This is why we form local church bodies.

This is why we gather, so that we would be able to live out the reality that we are one in Christ. Look around, see the other people here.

You are called to be bound to them, to be members of the same body. As believers, we should be members of a local church.

We should work out that membership in a local church as a reflection of the unity that all believers have in Christ.

[13:05] If you call yourself a Christian, but do not connect with, and care for, and commit yourself to a local church, then you are on shaky ground, and there may be cause for you to doubt even that your sins are forgiven.

If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

1 John 4.20 If we love God, we will love his people. And if you trust in God, you are very really united with his people.

But if you have not trusted in Christ, you are not reconciled to God. You are an enemy of God, and you cannot be joined to this church.

We are happy for you to come here, but there is no place, and there is no place we would rather people who don't believe in God be than here listening to the word.

[14:16] But we also call you to repent of your sins and trust in Christ. Now let's look at how this unity and this partnership that is so clearly taught in Scripture that we're united with God and then united with each other, works itself out in our text today.

Paul says, you also, helping together in prayer for us. The phrase helping together here does not first mean that they are helping Paul, or that they are together with Paul, but that they are working together with God who delivers to help Paul.

the context of the passage is, we trust in God that he will still deliver us, you also helping together with God in prayer for us.

It is not as if God needs our help, but he is pleased to invite us to join into his work. this is an amazing and a precious truth.

You are invited to participate in the work of God by prayer. God invites you to take part in his wonderful, perfect plans.

[15:42] how wonderful it would be to have your name in the credits when God brings about his great deliverance. How much of an honor is it for God to say to you, I am bringing the dead to life, I am saving many, I am delivering for my glory, and I want you to be a part of it.

So pray. Helping together with God by prayer for other believers.

I hope that the Spirit is working in your hearts to help you see how we partner with God and with his people. This is the first part of that summary statement.

When we pray, we partner with God and other believers. Now on to the second point. Share in suffering.

Share in suffering with each other. That raises two questions. Why should we? And where am I getting this from?

[16:56] Why should we share in suffering? And where does this instruction come from? If our prayer is this great partnership with God in his works of deliverance, then we should share in our sufferings so that we would be united in our difficulties and be able to pray in real, meaningful ways for each other.

A body suffers together. What happens to one is shared by all. If I stub my toe, my whole body joins in the suffering.

And no one burns their hand and says, whatever, it's just my hand. I don't care if it gets hurt. It's not actually me.

No, if it happens to my hand, then it happens to me. If something bad happens to you, then it happens to me.

Because we are one body in Christ. So we need to communicate with each other. we need to speak openly and honestly about the difficulties in our lives so that we can really live out what it means to be united to Christ and united to each other.

[18 : 31] Talk about what's really going on. Pursue real, open, honest relationships with those here in this church so that we can enjoy the fruits of unity in Christ.

But where am I getting this idea from? Is it just my own idea of how you're supposed to build a community together? In fact, it is not my idea, but it is the biblical reality that we are to share in our sufferings.

Look at Paul's example earlier in this chapter in verses 8 and 9 as he shares in his sufferings with the Corinthians. For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened beyond measure above strength so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. Paul shares in his sufferings with the Corinthians.

But if Paul's example is not enough for you, let us look to Christ's example. The Gospel of Mark chapter 14 verses 32 and 35.

[19 : 53] And when they came to a place called Gethsemane and he said to his disciples, sit here while I pray. And he took with him Peter and James and John and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

And he said to them, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.

And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, this hour might pass from him. If sharing in sufferings is good enough for Christ, then it's good enough for me. Share your sorrows and we will be united together. This is why Paul shares his difficulties not to complain, but that they might be partners.

And do not worry about people thinking less of you. We should know that when we talk to each other, we are dealing with sinners in the midst of a fallen world.

[21 : 05] Christians of all people should not be surprised that suffering difficulties and failures come. No one's life is great all the time.

We all need comfort and support, even Paul and even Christ. When we pray, we partner with God and other believers. Therefore, we should share our suffering, pray for each other, then we will be able to rejoice together.

Point number three, pray for one another. If we are partners with God and each other, then we ought to live that out by prayer.

Pray for each other, make a list, and get to work. Labor in prayer for people. Lists are very helpful to remember different things to concern yourself in prayer.

Every week there's a bulletin in the back that has a prayer list. You should take that with you and pray through it every week for the church. I myself, since I started coming here, have written all of your names down in a book with notes about you to help me care for you and pray for you.

[22 : 25] Jesus lives in heaven bringing our prayers before the Father, so we ought to pray for one another.

Hebrews 7 25 says, Consequently, he, that is Jesus, is able to save to the utter most those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Intercession is prayer. That means Jesus is forever in heaven praying for us, and we ought to pray for each other also.

But not only Christ, the Holy Spirit also prays for us. Romans 8 27 and 28 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes that is praise for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called to his purpose. Beyond all of this, we have an ironclad promise that God hears our prayers.

[23 : 47] Romans 8 32 He who did not spare his own son, but graciously gave him up for us, how will he not with him graciously give us all good things?

In giving his son to us, God has proven his generosity. He has proven his willingness to do whatever is for our good.

Since God gave us Christ, we can have every confidence he will answer our prayers. John 15 7 If you abide in me, that is Jesus, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

That is, if you are walking in close fellowship with God, your prayers will be heard. If we are partners with each other, united together, how could we not pray for each other?

If your suffering is my suffering, how could I not bring my prayers for you before God, as if that suffering is my own?

[25 : 07] And if your joys are my joys, why would I not want to partner with God to bring you deliverance and joy? You also helping together in prayer for us.

We ought to join together in real, serious prayer. I love how James speaks about this in James chapter 5 verses 16 through 18.

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.

And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. Do not just pray for physical healing and comfort, but pray for the spiritual prosperity of those who you are united with in Christ.

[26 : 22] Pray that each other would grow in knowledge and in fullness of faith. And know that prayer really does work. Paul can speak of the gift that is granted as a sure thing.

That when we pray, the God who delivers will bless us. There is no question. Prayer really works. And pray constantly, over and over. Elijah prayed seven times for the rain to come. Each time he sent a runner to go check and see if there were clouds in the sky, and the runner came back and told them there were none.

And yet Elijah prayed again and again until he came to the seventh time, and the runner saw the rain, saw the clouds in the sky.

the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. So pray fervently. Pray because it has real effects.

[27 : 35] When we pray, we partner with God and with other believers. Therefore, we should share in our sufferings, pray for each other, then we will be able to rejoice together.

Point four, rejoice together. And this is what comes out of all of our labors. Great gifts of God's deliverance.

As Paul writes, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us by many. Paul writes that the purpose of his sharing in his suffering and the outcome of their prayer for him is that many may rejoice, that many persons may give thanks for the great gifts of God on their behalf.

Do you want more joy in your life? Do you want to be filled with thankfulness? God has already given the means to you.

And part of that means is to join with him by prayer in the great works he is doing in the lives of those you are united with.

[29 : 00] You want to be filled with joy and thanksgiving? Pray for believers and see the great deliverance of God. God. This is the same as when Christ as with Christ.

When we join with Christ in his sufferings, we also join with Christ in his glory. When we join with each other in sufferings, we also join with each other in rejoicing.

a bit of a personal story. My family does not believe in God. In fact, many of them are hostile to the things of God.

This caused me great despair and suffering, especially when I was living with them as a Christian. but the church joined with me in that suffering.

They comforted me and prayed for me and I was comforted and they shared in my joy. One brother in particular prayed for me and my family regularly for nine years.

[30 : 10] Now, nine years later, God has delivered. My sister, three months ago, came to faith in Christ. my sister came to Christ and now many people who had partnered with me in my suffering now get to share the great joy that I've been enjoying of my sister's salvation.

Their faces being made glad by God's great deliverance. The words translated here in the passage as persons in the section that says that thanks may be given by many persons actually means faces or appearances.

this is a picture of people's countenances, their faces being filled and radiating gratitude for the good works of the Lord.

When we pray, God will with his great grace make our hearts sing with joy at his deliverance. Psalm 111 verse 2 great are the works of the Lord studied by all who delight in him.

When we pray, we partner with God and other believers. Therefore, we should share our sufferings, pray for each other, then we will be able to rejoice together in God.

[31 : 42] See our partnership with God and with each other. see how it was purchased by Christ. Live it out. Be amazed that God calls you by prayer to join in his works and that you get to have your name in the credits.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Commit yourself to a body and share yourself with them to love and pray for them and to reap a bountiful harvest. of rejoicing in good works. Lord, we pray that you would teach us to live out these truths. We thank you for our union with you in Christ and with each other and ask that you would equip us to do these wonderful things.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.