

Why do we pray?

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[0:00] But before we dive in, let's pray together. Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing.

Thank you that we have got to know you through your words, which you speak to us, which we hold in our hands.

And thank you that we can keep that conversation with you going as we pray. And Father God, we pray that you would help us this morning as we consider this topic.

Why do we join together in prayer? Help us to see the immense privilege that it is. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, as Shamar said, we're thinking today, why do we pray together? It's a very common part of what we do as Christians.

[1:18] But why? And why do it together? But before we dive into that, what is prayer? Prayer, very simply, it's talking with God.

I was looking up some of the greats of the past and what they've said about prayer. So here's one of them, John Bunyan, said of prayer this.

This prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God through Christ. In the strength of the Spirit, for such things as God has promised or according to his words, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God.

That's what we're doing, John Bunyan says, as we pray. As someone a bit more modern, just died a few years ago now, Tim Keller, he's written an excellent book on the subject of prayer, which I warmly commend to you to read through.

And he said this about what is prayer. Prayer is continuing a conversation with God that he started for us through his words and by his grace as he's called us to himself, which eventually becomes a full encounter with God.

[2:42] That's a really helpful way to put it, I think. Continuing the conversation that he's started with us already by his grace and through his words. Now often when we hear sermons on prayer, we hear things like that.

What is prayer? How do we do it ourselves? And it focuses very much on our individual prayer life. And that's important.

It's an important part of living daily as a Christian, isn't it? That we set aside time to pray, that we pray little prayers through the day.

Lord, help me with this. Lord, thank you for that. But also, praying together is really important too. And it's something we do a lot.

I was thinking about it this week. I'm not sure there's any meeting of our church that doesn't involve prayer. And so, when we gather on a Sunday morning, we pray.

[3:44] We have a time of prayer. Shama led us in one. But we also started with prayer. We'll end with prayer. Prayer is happening right through the service. Same on a Sunday evening.

There is prayer involved. Wednesday evening prayer meeting has obviously involved prayer.

There's a 9.30 prayer meeting as well on a Sunday morning.

Perhaps that goes under the radar a bit. But we do. We pray on Zoom. A committed bunch of folk praying for our day together. But other meetings involve prayer too.

Business meetings begin and end in prayer. And sometimes there's prayers throughout it as we consider a topic and we think that we need to pause for a moment and pray about that.

Prayer is throughout our life together as a church. But why? Why do we spend so much time and energy together praying?

[4:46] Why set aside particular meetings devoted to praying? Well, to consider that, we're going to be helped by Acts 1, particularly focusing on verse 14, which reads this.

They all join together constantly in prayer. Along with the women, Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers. Here we see the early church at prayer.

And we see two big things about prayer, which John Calvin says is necessary for true prayer. And so if John Calvin says that, good that we're thinking about it together.

The first thing is that they are united in prayer. They're united in prayer. The first few words of our verse, verse 14, they all joined together.

That could be translated, perhaps it is in your Bible. They all came together with one accord to pray. They came together as one. A one united body in the cause of praying to their gods.

[5:59] And that's important because we find as Christians, whether we like it or not, when we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we're united with the Lord's people.

United together as brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that unites all kinds of people, doesn't it? There's all kinds of people.

I'm looking at how that this morning. All kinds of people we're sitting amongst together. Each have different experiences of life and of church. And we may come to church.

We may come to church gatherings with our own thoughts about how things should be done in church life. Come together with our own frustrations.

Our own preferences. But we still, we come together. And we say, we're joining with these people. And we're saying we're united with them in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[7:02] And not just us here. We're united together with all sorts of brothers and sisters around the world as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

People around our city are united together in groups like this as the Lord Jesus' body. Groups, perhaps churches that we wouldn't dream of going to, but we know they're still brothers and sisters who are faithfully trusted.

We're going to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's wonderful that God unites us in that way. And as we pray together, it's a very important part of our unity.

Because praying breaks down the walls of division that could creep in amongst us. United prayer is a great leveller.

Because it reminds us we're on the same level as one another. The Bible says, none of us must think of ourselves more highly than we ought.

[8:14] And I think prayer is a great way to remind us of that. Because in prayer, we can be reminded that we're each human beings created by our Creator God and coming in complete and utter dependence on Him.

Privileged together to call Him our Heavenly Father. We're all children of God. We're all children of God. We're all weak creatures coming before Him.

And as we pray, as we call out to Him in that way, together, we're reminded that we're all weak.

And we don't know what to do, Lord. Lord, here are our thoughts. Here are our requests. Here are our plans.

But, Lord, Your will be done. Lord, this is Your church. This is Your work. Not ours.

[9:26] Would Your will be done, we pray. We ask this not for our glory, but for Your glory. We ask this not for the sake of Calvary Church being known, but for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ being known.

It's a great way to remind ourselves of the humility that we need before Him. It's a great way to remind ourselves we're on the same level.

We're all simply human beings seeking our great God together. And in that unity that we see as we pray together, we see we're all kinds of different people praying.

Just like here in this passage, according to verse 15, there's 120 believers here. And we get some of their names.

So in verse 13, we get the names of the apostles who are present. Those present were Peter.

[10:35] Peter and John, two of the great apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter, who not very long before this, had denied Jesus so publicly.

And yet he's there. He's been restored by the Lord Jesus very graciously. And he's there and he's praying with his brothers. Further down the list, we've even got Thomas.

Again, not long before this, he was doubting that Jesus could have ever risen. Remember, the risen Lord Jesus appeared to many of his disciples.

But Thomas wasn't present. And he was like, no, I'll never believe in him. Not unless I see those scars. Those wounds. And a week later, the risen Lord Jesus appeared to him and he was rebuked. And now Thomas is saying, yeah, I need to pray. I need to pray with my brothers. And I can pray.

[11:47] Because those scars that I saw on the Lord Jesus Christ, those wounds in his hands and his feet, showed me that he has made a special way for me to come before God in prayer.

You'd be glad to know it's not just a men's meeting. Women and men joined together. End of verse 14.

They joined constantly in prayer with the women. Mary, the mother of Jesus. And presumably the women mentioned here are those mentioned by the writer of Acts, Luke, in his gospel at the end. And just flick over Luke 24, verse 10. Post Jesus' resurrection.

Verse 10 lists some of the women involved. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

[13:06] So I presume that the women that Luke mentions are some of those named there. Mary Magdalene, with her reputation for being a sinful woman, is there praying because she knows that through her crucified and risen Lord Jesus, she can come confidently, whatever she's done in the past, confidently before the throne of God, knowing that her sins have been paid for.

And Joanna, who's listed by Luke there, we know from Luke chapter 8, she once served in King Herod's palace, and now she gets to sit in this room in Jerusalem and join with brothers and sisters in coming to a much higher throne and a much better king.

What a great bunch of people. Such a different people gathered together, and we don't know all of them.

There's 120. We only get a few names. But we do know that they were people like us. Real human beings going through real struggles and joys, knowing the realities of life, some who perhaps seem to have a really strong faith in the Lord and others whose faith was perhaps very shaky and weak. Particularly is that the Lord Jesus has gone again. He had gone when he was crucified, he was buried in a tomb, and that was a struggle for the followers of the Lord Jesus.

[14:52] And now he was gone again, he's ascended into heaven, and they're there waiting. They had been promised the Holy Spirit. But humanly speaking, it's probably a very fearful time for some of them.

But yet they're united there with their brothers and sisters, and they're coming together to pray. And that's what happens when we come together too.

All sorts of us, gathering together with all our fears, all our doubts, knowing the sins we've committed in the past, knowing many sorrows, knowing many joys as well.

Yet we come as a united body to the throne of God in prayer. We need to talk to him. We need to pour out our hearts to him.

And this display of remarkable unity, of all sorts of different people coming before the Lord in prayer, is a wonderful witness.

[15:57] I think it was here, as they pray in the city of Jerusalem, a very fractured city, where the most divisive figure of human history had walked the streets of it just days before.

And they are there, and they're meeting to pray to him. Meeting to pray to the one who had crowds of people welcoming him into that city on one day, and then a few days later, crowds of people calling for his crucifixion, his execution.

And then he really was executed, so publicly in that city. But he rose again from the dead. He showed the powers and authorities that they couldn't bring him down.

But we know that the disciples felt vulnerable post-crucifixion, didn't they? They hid themselves in that locked room for fear that the authorities would seize them next.

And now the risen Jesus has gone again. Humanly speaking, many of them will feel vulnerable again in that city. And yet they resolutely choose to come together in united prayer to their gods.

[17:24] whatever the authorities around them think, they are saying, no, we're going to keep praying.

We're going to keep trusting our gods. And today, we live in a world around us, which seems so divided.

A world where people unite around different opinions, and if you disagree with them, you're wrong, you're wrong, and you're not welcome. There's so many culture wars going on, isn't there, at the moment.

Division over people born in the UK and those not born in the UK. People disagreeing over rights for certain groups or not rights for certain groups.

People disagreeing so publicly and aggressively over politics. It's all over. And we lament that division. And then add Jesus into the mix and people are divided right over him, aren't they?

[18:35] Some people are interested in who he is and others really are not and don't want to know him and his people. Yet each week, we gather here on Sundays and on Wednesday evenings and we're saying to the world around us, we are united together.

despite our differences, we're united together in the Lord Jesus Christ and we're going to keep seeking him. We're going to keep coming before his throne in prayer.

And in doing so, it can be a great display of unity to the watching world around us. and in doing so, we display something of who our God is.

He is perfectly and happily united in himself, one God in three persons. And in coming together, we reflect something of that remarkable unity.

Secondly, we see that they are devoted in their praying. Verse 14, they all join together constantly in prayer.

[19:55] That word constantly there could be translated as devoted or persevering or faithful in prayer. not that they spend every waking moment in prayer, but that they were doing this committedly and regularly together.

And not just here, not just whilst they were waiting for the Holy Spirit to come, but post-Pentecost, we find that's what the church does. So chapter 2, verse 42, we read this, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of breads and to prayer.

Devoted to praying. The Spirit had come, but that doesn't stop the need for praying. In fact, as Bunyan's definition of prayer said, we do it in the strength of the Spirit.

The Spirit helps His people to pray. It's part of keeping in step with the Spirit that we pray. And we see that word devoted to prayer in other places in the New Testament.

So in Romans chapter 12, verse 12, we read this. It's worth turning there if you can. Romans 12, verse 12.

[21:33] Paul writes, be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. The word faithful is the same word we've got for constantly or devoted to prayer.

And then another verse, Colossians chapter 4. Colossians chapter 4, verse 2. Again, same word, devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

faithful. In other words, it's the church's job to be regularly, faithfully devoted to praying to their gods.

faithfully It's not the only job of the church. We have the job of fulfilling the great commission. Jesus told his disciples, go and tell the nations, be making disciples, be preaching, be baptizing, be walking alongside one another in our joys and struggles, but we must do it all with a prayerful disposition.

It's our duty to pray. And that's what they do here in Acts.

[23:07] And that's what the New Testament church is called to continue to do. In other words, God doesn't recognize a church where there is no prayer.

It's essential. In 1 Peter 2 verse 9, Peter talking about the church, he says this, this is your identity, you're a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Part of that identity is that we're a royal priesthood. Like the priests of the Old Testament, they were the ones who could come close to God. But now we're all part of that priesthood and we all get to come close to God.

It's a wonderful privilege that we have as the Lord's people. And so the Bible says use that privilege. Be faithful in using that privilege.

we get to come to the highest throne and we get to speak to the one seated on it.

[24:30] We pray together. Why do we pray together? Because that's part of our identity as people of God. We're people who get to commune with him. we've got special access because of our Saviour.

He unites us to himself and unites us with his people. It's part of who we are. And so if you're a Christian this morning, don't think that praying is just a special duty that the pastors or leaders of a church service have to do.

Don't think it's the job of just those who are able to go to the prayer meeting on a Wednesday night. Don't think it's just for them. When we say in a service, we're going to pray now.

It's not just the person at the front saying some words, it's all of us joining together around the three. And we say amen.

And we can say loud amens because we're in this together. As words are being prayed, we can say yes, Lord, in our minds, in our hearts, or even out loud, yes, Lord, please, Lord, hear us, Lord.

[25:57] It's not a passive thing. We're doing it together. And you know what we see here in this passage, just how God works through his prayers, through the prayers of his people.

We do not know what was on the agenda for their prayer meetings. things. We assume they prayed that the gift of the spirit, which was promised, would come as Jesus said it would.

And that prayer was, of course, answered in chapter T. And that's part of praying. Lord, you have promised this in your word.

Please, would you make it to be so? would you bring this about? And then we also get this important meeting from verse 15 about who is going to be raised up as an apostle in the place of Judas, who very tragically took his life.

And they were guided by the scriptures in this process. Verse 20, Peter said, it's written this in the book of Psalms, May his place be deserted, let there be no one to dwell in it.

[27:16] And may another take his place of leadership guided by scripture. And then they say what they're doing, verse 21, therefore it's necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living amongst us, from John's baptism to the time when he was taken from us.

And they must be a witness of his resurrection. That's the qualification for an apostle. And so they nominate two men in verse 23. And then what do they do?

They pray together. Verse 24 is their prayer. Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry.

And then after the prayerful decision making, they take their decision by drawing lots.

I'm not advocating that's the way we make our decisions as a church, but the principle is there.

They trusted the Lord, they trusted his word, and they took it to prayer.

[28:28] They said, here's what we've got to decide, here's who we're thinking, please, we pray, would you be sovereignly working through the outcome of our decision making.

I say I'm not advocating drawing lots, but in our members meetings we do cast votes and we trust that the Lord is working in those votes.

We trust that he is guiding us as his people, making the way clear for us as a church as we go forward.

And the outcome here was a new apostle, a new leader amongst this early church. And we want to pray for our own church here that the Lord would continue to raise up leaders amongst us.

The harvest is plentiful of the Lord Jesus says, but the laborers are few and we feel that. It would be lovely to continue to see the eldership strengthened and deacon team strengthened here, but even more, we'd love the Lord to raise up and provide new teachers for the Sunday Club and the CY group, more women's workers to be able to disciple other women in the church, more people with clear gifts of evangelism to help us to reach the lost in this city.

[30:04] We can be praying for the Lord to be doing that, to be raising people up. He is sovereign and he hears the prayers of his people when we come together and join round his throne.

And for that then, we must be doing it. We must be committed together to be constantly joining together around his throne and laying out our requests before him and trusting that he will do what is right for his glory.

And all of us can do it. All of us can do it. Remember we said it's a great level at all of us. If we know the Lord Jesus as our saviour, all of us can be doing this.

Let me encourage you with this story as we close. You won't know the lady on this screen. Her name's Celestia A. Ferris.

She was a very ordinary woman from history. Born in New York in 1844. grew up in Washington, D.C.

[31:22] during the American Civil War. She and her family were members of a prominent Baptist church in Washington, but the church split over the issue of slavery.

Shortly after the war, she met and married a man of the name Abraham Ferris, who was severely injured actually in battle when he rescued the life of his captain.

Once they were married, they moved to a new area of Washington, D.C., the Capitol Hill area, close to the White House. But there was no Baptist church in the area, and so they began praying.

two years into their marriage, they called their friends together to be praying in their home for a new Baptist church to begin. And they kept praying, and they kept praying, and two years later, the group grew, and they had an opportunity to start a Sunday school work, which was seen as a key witness to the area.

And the Lord worked through that. They slowly saw some of the children and their families converted. But it wasn't until 11 years of this ordinary bunch of people organized by this lady that finally a new church was formed.

[32:55] Tragically, her husband Abraham didn't get to see it. He died a year before the church began. But this lady did see the answers to her and her husband's prayers from those 11 years.

Largely forgotten in the history books, but not forgotten in the life of the local church that she had a hand in forming under the Lord's Providence.

And the church today is known as Capitol Hill Baptist Church. And it still has a great influence among many evangelical Baptists across America and even across the world.

And that's just one story of what one ordinary lady's prayers have done. So why pray?

Well, the Lord loves to work through the prayers of ordinary Christian people like us. Who knows what he may do in the weeks and months and years ahead as we continue to be committed together to pray.

[34:16] And let's indeed continue to make sure we are committed to being here together on a Sunday morning and if we're able to on a Sunday evening part of what we do is pray.

Come out on a Wednesday evening if you're able to and pray with the Lord's people. You won't be forced to pray out loud if that's a fear that you have. We won't be forcing you to do that if you feel uncomfortable.

You can still join in with the prayers. You can still say hearty amens because we're in it together. And don't feel that you have to limit praying together just for those formal times we set up as a church.

Perhaps find one or two people in the church family you can be saying let's just meet and pray together every few weeks. Ask one another over WhatsApp how can I pray for you?

And we trust that even in our own individual prayer times we're joining together as brothers and sisters around the throne of God and we're praying.

[35:31] And on that note let me pray now before I hand back to Shema. Heavenly Father thank you so much for this privilege of being able to join together regularly and faithfully in prayer.

Lord help us to continue to exercise this privilege of coming before your throne and we ask this in Jesus name. Amen.