

WITH ONE HEART & MOUTH

a people who pray together

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
[Romans 15.5-6]

Should we pray together as a congregation, and if so, why? And how does that differ from the praying together which forms part of our Sunday worship?

Is there Scriptural warrant for a congregational ‘prayer meeting’, and if so what is it?

Where, for instance, would you take a person if they asked for the biblical rationale for a fellowship of God’s people gathering on a regular basis specifically to pray together?

There are a whole load of good and important questions around this theme of corporate prayer! Our hope is that it will prove both important and helpful for us to look at these questions together, through the Sunday morning series of studies and then in the context of our Community Groups.

*

The hardest thing – but perhaps the most important thing – may be for us deliberately to start in our thinking from a ‘blank canvas’: our past experience and our previous approaches are bound to *inform* our thinking, understandably so, but it will be important for us to ensure that they don’t *prejudice* our thinking.

We’ll aim to get to grips then, first, with the *principles* involved, and then try to discern together how these principles will be best worked out and expressed in *practice* here at this time.

Hopefully, our being able prayerfully to address these issues together in this way will help us come to a clear and common mind under God on this crucial matter as to His way forward for us here at this time.

“If My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then ...”

*

No pressure!

Please don't feel any pressure to answer *every* question in your Community Group! I've stuck with the pattern of there being 7 (sets of) questions, as much as anything to provide a set of daily study notes for those who find it helpful to work their way through the passage like that. The time you have in a Community Group is limited and inevitably, therefore, you may need to be selective in which questions you look at.

Priorities!

You'll know your own group, so use what you'll find most helpful. Key questions for us all as a fellowship this week are probably questions 3, 5 & 6, so do aim to cover at least these in the time that you have: and again please feed back any insights which would seem to be of benefit to us all!

Prayer!

Do try also to make a point in your Community Group of leaving time for praying together!

*

1. Acts 1.1-2.1 [week beginning Sunday 23rd October]

“..they all joined together constantly in prayer”

The book of Acts narrates the remarkable story of the early church. It's clear that from the outset that that story is bound up with their being a people for whom prayer was a central part of their lives.

Consider, for instance, the following passages from the first part of the book to see how central their praying was to the story – **Acts 2.42, 4.23-31, 6.4, 9.11, 12.5, and 13.3.**

It's no coincidence, therefore, that the whole book starts with a chapter recording the disciples of Jesus praying – the account of their praying (vv.12-14) being prefaced by the *context* (vv.1-11) and followed by the *consequence* of their praying.

1. Read through the whole chapter. When it comes to the activity of prayer, most of us feel just like the first disciples of Jesus! They asked Him, '*Lord, teach us to pray*' (read **Luke 11.1-4**): so perhaps as we begin this new study we should all make that our common prayer.

What do you find most difficult about prayer?

What are you hoping to learn from this series of studies?

2. Read vv.1-5. Prayer is essentially a *relational* activity: we are encouraged to 'pour out our hearts' to the Lord as the One whom we may trust at all times (see **Psalm 62.8**). But just because it is relational (rather than ritual) it will vary according to the context. The background to the disciples' praying here is set out in these opening verses of the chapter.

In vv.3-5 what three things are we told Jesus did in relation to His disciples?

How might each of these have 'fed in' to their praying?

3. **Read vv.6-8.** The '*gift (the) Father promised*' (v.4) is here described more fully for the disciples by Jesus, as He speaks to them about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

From what you read in these verses how would you describe the ministry the Holy Spirit exercises in and through His people?

Read **Luke 11.5-13** for our encouragement. How might this inform (and perhaps transform) our praying?

***Action.** Make sure before this study is finished that you translate what you've been learning into action – and pray in these terms!*

4. **Read vv.9-11.** Alongside these verses narrating a key moment in the outworking of God's purpose, it will be helpful to read **Luke 22.69** (with its parallel in **Matt.26.66**), **Acts 7.55-56**, and **Dan.7.13-14**.

In the light of these passages what do you think is the significance of Jesus' ascension the disciples witnessed?

In what way might this have had an impact on the praying to which the following verses will refer?

How might it affect our praying?

5. **Read vv.12-14.** In the immediate aftermath of Jesus' ascension, and against the backdrop of the call they have been given (read

Matt.28.18-20 along with **Acts 1.8**), the first activity to which the disciples turn is that of prayer.

Thinking yourself into their situation, how and what would you have been praying?

How might we best foster the same urgency and expectancy in our praying together?

6. Read vv.12-14. *'They all joined together constantly in prayer.'* We'll be learning throughout this series of studies about *corporate* prayer: if prayer can be hard, corporate prayer can be more daunting still!

What are the things which make praying together with others difficult?

Why do you think they saw it as so important for them to be *joining together* constantly like this in prayer?

What might be comparable circumstances today where you can see that it would be important for believers to join together in prayer?

7. Read 1.15-2.1. What's recorded here is best seen as an 'outcome' of their praying together. There's at least a hint (v.17) that they recognized they were all implicated in the failure of Judas. And in prayerfully (v.24) seeking together to address that failure, they are careful to allow their thinking and actions to be formed by the Word of God.

What have you found helpful in your own life as ways of combining your praying with your reading of, and reflection on, God's Word?

Try not to think in terms of our past or present practice as a fellowship, and consider now the *form* of their gathering. What might this combination of communal prayer, pastoral teaching, and practical action, look like when a fellowship joins together in prayer?