

WITH ONE HEART & VOICE

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 voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” [Romans 15.5-6]

We hope this series of studies will help us get to grips with the principles behind corporate prayer, and then discern together how best they may be worked out among us here in practice. You'll find the background to the series [here](#).

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 5 & 7, 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!

2. “.. access to the Father ..” (Ephesians 2.11-18)

[week beginning Sunday 30th October]

The theme of unity is one which runs right the way through this whole important letter. God’s purpose in Jesus, Paul understood, is “*to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ*” (**Eph.1.10**): it’s no great surprise, therefore, that when he came to the practical exhortations addressed to the church at Ephesus, top of the list was the call to “*make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit ..*” (**Eph.4.3**).

This passage in Ephesians 2 is set against that background and explains both how that unity has been created, and how it finds expression.

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1. Read the whole of Ephesians 2. The whole chapter paints a marvelous picture of the change which has come about in the lives and experience of believers. We have been made *alive* (vv.1-10), and we’ve been made to *belong* (vv.11-18).

What has been your experience of being now ‘alive’ in Christ?

How have you been helped (if at all!) to feel no longer ‘on the outside’, but a member now of God’s household (v.19)?

2. **Read vv.11-12.** In these verses Paul underlines the relational 'distance' there used to be between us and God.

What phrases does Paul use here to highlight this 'distance' between ourselves and God?

How would you respond to someone who wasn't a Christian but said nonetheless that they felt 'close to God'?

3. **Read v.13.** The rituals of the Old Testament almost all had to do with 'distance'; how close (or not) you could get to God. The very geography of the temple (as well as its rituals) highlighted this essential 'distance'. Being 'brought near' to God is now a great relational reality for the Christian.

Think of the people whom you'd regard as being 'nearest' to you relationally: in what ways does that 'nearness' find expression?

And what are the parallels between such 'nearness' in those relationships and our having been brought near to God through Christ?

4. **Read v.14.** As well as being brought near to God through the work of Christ, Jew and Gentile are brought near to one another: Paul describes this aspect of Christ's work more broadly in **Col.3.11-14.**

What might be contemporary examples of the sort of 'hostility' between Jew and Gentile, 'slave and free', etc., to which Paul refers here?

In what ways does the church, as a body of diverse and divided people now made one ("*He .. has made the two one..*"), provide a powerful 'visual aid' of the gospel?

5. Read vv.15-16. Reconciliation (or relational 'peace') clearly lies at the heart of God's purpose in the gospel – both 'horizontally' (between individuals) and 'vertically' (between us and God).

If Jesus has made this relational 'peace' possible for us 'horizontally', what sort of things make it hard to realize in practice?

Against the backdrop of these two verses, why will our joining together in prayer be so pleasing to God?

6. Read vv.17. In one of the early, single-sentence summaries of the gospel, Peter described it to a Roman (Gentile) centurion as "*the good news of peace through Jesus Christ*" (see **Acts 10.34-43**).

What is this 'peace' to which both Peter (in Acts) and Paul (here) are referring?

When you are 'at peace' relationally with someone in what ways will this be evident?

7. Read v.18. As a climax to what Paul has just been saying, this single verse provides as concise a summary of the essence of prayer as you will find! It's worth pondering, and savouring, every phrase!

Why is it only "*through Him (Jesus)..*" that we can engage in prayer?

In the light of the previous verses, to what extent does Paul's observation that "*we both..*" have this privilege suggest the importance of God's people praying together?

In what ways will the fact that we have "*access to the Father..*" affect and enrich our praying?

In what sense do you think it is "*by one Spirit..*" that we have this access to the Father?