

TEACH ME TO PRAY

ACTS 1:14; 2:42

THE HELP OF THE SAINTS



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

First Byron is known as **a Bible church**, a church that teaches and preaches the Bible without compromise or apology, in the pulpit, in Bible Studies, in small groups, and various youth ministries.

First Byron is known as **a worshipping church**, a church that prioritizes congregational singing of old and new songs that glorify God..

First Byron is known as **a welcoming church**, a church that warmly welcomes visitors and works hard to integrate visitors into our church family.

First Byron is known as **a missionary church**, a church that sends and supports multiple evangelists and missionaries at home and around the world.

First Byron is known as **a shepherding church**, a church where the pastors and elders actively seek out and shepherd the flock.

First Byron is known as **a generous church**, a church that gives away hundreds of thousands of dollars every year to good causes.

First Byron is known as **a Christian education church**, a church that sacrificially supports Christians families to educate their children in quality Christian schools.

That's a lot! But I have a question. Are we known as **a praying church**? When people think of First Byron, do they think, "That's a place where the Christians are devoted to congregational prayer" or that prioritizes united prayer." **How can we increase the priority of joint prayer in our congregation?**

It was a priority for the New Testament church. They devoted themselves to prayer while waiting for the Holy Spirit. **All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers** (Acts 1:14). They devoted themselves to prayer after the Holy Spirit was poured out. **And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers** (Acts 2:42). How can we devote ourselves to prayer like the early Christians? How can we fulfill this part of God's purpose for his church? (Isa. 56:7).

BACKGROUND

Acts 1:14 and Acts 2:42 bookend the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. It's no accident that the Spirit was poured out in response to prayer and also increased prayer.



Why should we have more joint prayer in our congregation?



JOINT PRAYER BRINGS EXTRA BLESSINGS TO US AND EXTRA GLORY TO GOD

This is the last sermon in our series on prayer. It's last, but not least. In fact, in a very real sense, the last is first. In our context, it's the most important sermon of all. It's the one that all the others on prayer have been driving towards. The previous sermons, with their varied imagery, were laying the foundation for this one.

- **The cross:** We learned about the power and persuasion of praying in Jesus's name.
- **The throne:** We learned how to pray with confidence by coming to the throne of grace.
- **The battlefield:** We learned how to be prayer warriors, engaging in spiritual warfare on our knees.
- **The supper:** We learned how prayer brings us into the closest possible communion with God.
- **The door:** We learned how to bring all our needs to the open door of God's ear.
- **The window:** We learned how prayer changes our perspective for the better about everything.
- **The schedule:** We learned how we can pray both at formal fixed times and informally at all times.
- **The help of the Spirit:** We learned about how the Holy Spirit prays for us in our heart-groans.
- **The help of the Son:** We learned how the Son of God prays for us in the courts of heaven.

All these benefits are available for individual prayer and family prayer. But they are even more available for group prayer. We're also encouraged towards group prayer by the fact that the Lord's model prayer is in the first person plural (we/our/us) and therefore clearly intended to be used by Christians praying together.

The Bible and church history teach that God gives blessings when Christians pray together (2 Chron. 7:14; Matt. 18:19; Acts 3:1; 4:23-31; 12:12; 13:2-3; 14:23; 16:13, 16).

- The blessing of **more answered prayers** (Matt. 18:19)
- The blessing of **God's presence** in prayer (Matt. 18:20)
- The blessing of **sharing burdens, joys, and sorrows** (Gal. 6:2; Rom. 12:15) and therefore closer fellowship with one another.
- The blessing of **learning how to pray** by listening to others pray. The great theologian John Owen said that "the prayers of the weakest saints may be useful to the greatest apostle."
- The blessing of **more prayer** as we are stirred up to pray in our private lives and as other groups start.
- The blessing of **revival**. Pentecost and multiple examples in church history demonstrate that widespread spiritual revival often follows Christians praying together.

Charles Spurgeon said, "How could we look for a Pentecost if we never met with one accord, in one place, to wait upon the Lord? Brethren, we shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general till the prayer-meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians." Dr. A. T. Pierson once said, "There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer." The Reformed faith has experienced more revival in Korea than anywhere else in the world in the last half-century. Why? Christians there gather 365 mornings a year for prayer. Google "Prayer and Revival" to find many articles about how revivals of true Christianity followed the revival of united prayer meetings.

When blessing comes in response to group prayer, God gets great glory. He gets great glory because group prayer emphasizes that we are helpless and entirely dependent upon God for blessing. When there is little or no group prayer, God holds back blessing because then people would attribute it to the pastor or the church.



CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

There are many different ways we can increase joint prayer in our church. We can join the prayer group that meets on Wednesday at 7.30 pm in the Haven. If that time or place does not work for you, then we can have group prayer meetings at other times. We can pray together over the phone or over Zoom. We can add prayer to existing group meetings. We can meet in twos and threes or tens or twenties. We can have men's prayer groups and women's prayer groups. Some might be for seniors, some for our young. Some could meet early morning, others in the evening. Some may meet before church services or after, or through the week. We can have regular church-wide prayer meetings. We can have prayer groups devoted to mission, revival, the new building project, individual needs. However or whenever, here are some general guidelines to help make joint prayer work.

Have clear leadership. Someone should take the lead and give clear direction and set the tone. It can be a different person each week, but the person should know beforehand and prepare appropriately. That may also involve picking a particular theme for each week.

Prepare. Take some time before the prayer time to think through what you pray for or ask others to pray for.

Set a time limit. Better to start short (15 or 30 minutes) than so long that it cannot be sustained. Encourage multiple short prayers rather than few long prayers that are hard to keep focused on.

Share prayer thanks and prayer requests. Sharing answered prayer encourages more prayer. Make sure you have more time for prayer than for prayer requests.

Speak loudly. There's no point in praying if the prayers cannot be heard by others. Volume also helps energy levels.

Don't say "I." We are praying on behalf of others, his church family.

Sing praise songs every 10 minutes. This helps sustain concentration, energy levels, and a worshipful spirit.

Pray specifically. Pray for individual needs, congregational needs, ministries, missionaries, nations, etc.

Take notes. Someone should take notes of prayer requests and conclude with any not yet prayed for.

Repeat prayers quietly. Don't just listen but join with the prayer by saying the words quietly to yourself.

Say "Amen." Encourages the one praying and enlivens the ones praying with him/her. "I agree with that prayer."

Review with ACTS. At the end of each prayer meeting or before beginning another, review the balance of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication and adjust accordingly.



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

Add prayer to group meetings. It would be wonderful if every single ministry, small group, Bible study, youth meeting would integrate group prayer into every gathering. This is the easiest way to increase devotion to prayer.

Add group prayer meetings. There already is a regular weekly prayer meeting but that time may not work for you. So why not start one at another time and place.

Prayer. Helper of the helpless, thank you for the help of your Spirit, your Son, and your saints. Help me to get your help through joint prayer times in our church family.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think joint prayer is not prioritized in most churches today?
2. What other blessings are received through joint prayer?
3. What did you learn from Googling "prayer and revival"?
4. How can we use prayer to give God more glory?
5. What other practical help would you give when starting a prayer group?
6. What will you do to increase joint prayer in our church and in your life?

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