

The importance of meeting for congregational or corporate prayer

We all understand the importance of personal and private prayer for a Christian. If we have any doubts, then we should look no further than the example given to us by our Lord Jesus himself who not only taught his disciples to pray but invested much time in practicing this discipline. Read for example Luke chapters 4-6 and note how often we read that Jesus withdrew to a solitary place to pray.

But what about the priority for congregational or corporate prayer? If you are less convinced, perhaps you might like to read about the congregational prayer meetings recorded for us in Acts 4 v 24-30 or Paul's words to the church in Philippi (Philippians 1:19).

Why therefore do we meet corporately as a body of believers on a Wednesday evening and before the evening service on a Sunday? The chief reasons can be summarised as follows -

- We have the clear biblical pattern to follow in God's Word. He has promised that where the two or three are gathered in His name he will be in our midst. From its early days after Pentecost, the prayer meeting was a regular feature of the early church who were devoted to the practice. There are about 30 references to prayer in the Book of Acts alone.
- We are engaged in spiritual warfare and we need not only to put on the whole armour of God but to cover it all in prayer. (Ephesians 6:18). The writer John Piper says, 'We cannot know what prayer is for until we know that life is war. That's not all it is. But it is always that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth'.
- Praying together strengthens the unity of the church, helps us to bear each other's burdens and stay true to the purposes of Christ. Again, there are numerous occasions, for example in the Book of Acts of the church coming together in prayer and God using the corporate prayers of his people to achieve his purposes. Have you ever thought if you are absent, then you are neither receiving encouragement nor being an encouragement to someone else?

Perhaps you think the prayer meeting is the preserve of the 'chosen few' or that praying in public is too hard and that you feel unable to pray out loud. Not so! Our prayers can be spoken and audible or quiet and silent.

Our prayer meetings present an opportunity to firstly thank God for who he is and what he has done for us in Christ, to pray for each other and the pastoral needs of the congregation, to pray for the church at home and abroad in mission, to pray for our district and community that we have been placed in and many other things.

There are many distractions in our busy lives but is it not true that the time we give to any activity is a clear indicator of the importance we attach to it? Wouldn't it be great if we needed to put more chairs out in the Dunlop Hall on a Wednesday night at 7.45pm or that the Nelson Room was too small to accommodate us at 6.30pm on a Sunday or that we had to start at an earlier time?

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit (Ephesians 6:18)

The Kirk Session

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