In 2007, Johnson Kell, longtime faithful member of the Bear Valley Church of Christ and former elder there, came up with an idea he called “Bear Valley Sings and Prays.” His basic belief was that there is much power when the church prays together.

A sense of fellowship, joy and confidence develops when we pray as a church. We may pray together at church camp, teen devotions and family devotions; in hospitals; before meals in restaurants; and of course, at worship services. Something is different and special about praying together. A bond is built through such prayers.

Do you know the first time we read of the church praying together? Luke recorded it in Acts 4:23-32. Many great lessons are learned from this passage when the Jerusalem congregation prayed together.

When they prayed together, there was unity (Acts 4:24). The book of Acts reveals the church spending a lot of time together when it was first established (2:44, 46). So we are not surprised to see them lifting their voice with one accord.

One of the most beautiful phrases in the New Testament is “they prayed.” They prayed before selecting Judas’ replacement (1:24), prayed for new Christians (8:15) and for missionaries (13:3), and prayed when appointing elders and for the elders (14:23). The ones praying were the disciples, the church or a group within the church. A powerful, uniting force is

When the Church Prays Together

by Neal Pollard

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brought about why we pray together.


Interestingly, they knew Scripture (here, the Old Testament) well enough to quote it in prayer, and they quoted from a cross section of Scripture (the Law, history and the Psalms). We quote Scripture in our songs and sermons and during the Lord’s Supper and the contribution. How awesome that these early saints were so full of Scripture that it came out during their prayers!

Can you think of scriptures that would be appropriately quoted in prayers? We do use phrases such as “Your will be done” and “forgive us our sins” from the model prayer in Matthew 6. Why not try to add other phrases or verses to your prayers? Read and consider adding such thoughts as those found in Psalms 119:144; 19:14; or Proverbs 30:8-9. Certainly, quoting Scripture in praying together is helpful and edifying for us. God knows those scriptures – He’s the author! But it helps us.

When they prayed together, there was belief in God’s greatness (Acts 4:24, 28, 30). Jesus began the model prayer by saying, “Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name” (Matthew 6:9). Jesus was teaching His disciples (and us) to see God’s greatness expressed in prayer. He wanted us to set God apart from the common, holding Him in awe, honor and reverence (cf. Psalm 89:7).

The Jerusalem church held God in the highest regard. Their prayers reflected their belief in the greatness of God, and they expressed this belief in three ways. (1) They expressed this in praise (Acts 4:24). Their praise reflected the psalmist’s attitude in Psalm 150. We see God’s greatness in nature, in people’s lives, and in Scripture.

(2) They expressed this in asking for God to do what He purposed (Acts 4:27-28). They saw that no matter what man intended by his actions, God’s hand would turn it into whatever He intended. God is not caught off guard by anything that happens or anything that men do. What a wonderful thing to pray for God to carry out His predetermined purpose! What a reminder that God is in control of our lives!

(3) They expressed this in asking for God to show His power (Acts 4:29-30). In their day, that meant healing, signs and wonders. What was the purpose of such? To show His power. Is it not great to know that in prayer we are calling on an unlimited God to do the unlimited? Notice that they were not asking for God to show His power out of selfishness. These faithful Christians had their hearts set on God’s work being done.

When they prayed together, there was an emphasis on Jesus (Acts 4:26-27, 30). The Jerusalem church spoke of Jesus three times in this short prayer. The church had not been around for very long. Most of these Christians had probably been converted on Pentecost or shortly thereafter. They would have been those Jews who heard Peter and the apostles preach (2:22-36). They appreciated what they had found in Jesus. When they prayed to God, they were not able to stop talking about Jesus.

What is most important to us as a church? What do we talk about? What do we pray about? Peter and John had been preaching and converting people with the message of Jesus. That made people realize these men had been with Jesus (Acts 4:10-13). If our lives, hearts and prayers revolve around Jesus, people will realize we have been with Jesus too.

When they prayed together, there was a request for help (Acts 4:29). What was the context of this prayer? When the rulers, elders, scribes and chief priests heard how many were accepting the message of Jesus. That made people realize these men had been with Jesus (Acts 4:10-13). If our lives, hearts and prayers revolve around Jesus, people will realize we have been with Jesus too.

At the end of that prayer, they asked the Lord to do two things: look and grant. They wanted God to observe their enemies’ activities, and they wanted God to give them boldness to speak the Word.

Notice the spiritual nature of their prayer. It is not wrong for us to pray for our health, financial blessings, our jobs, our families, etc. However, observing their prayer, we can see why the church grew in those days. It reminds me of what Paul asked the Christians at Ephesus (Ephesians 6:19) and Colossae (Colossians 4:2); he asked them to pray for him and his co-workers that they would have boldness and opportunity.

That is what we need to pray for and what we need to hear one another praying for. As we look at our culture and how far from God many have gone, we need His help. Never has our nation and this world needed Christ more than it does now.

When they prayed together, there was an answer to prayer (Acts 4:31). This is perhaps the best part of this entire passage. We are not going to have the kind of answer today they got that day. The whole place shook, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak the Word of God with boldness. Obviously, God does not answer our prayers with miracles as He did that day recorded in Acts 4. But He still answers prayers in wonderful ways today!

We can be confident that God hears and answers our prayers. Three times in the book of Revelation (5:8; 8:3-4) the prayers of the saints are compared to incense. James 5:16-18 reminds us of how valuable and effective our prayers are. When our prayers are shaped by spiritual interests, we can have confidence that our prayers will be heard.

We can spend time together as a congregation in lots of ways that will make us closer. Church picnics, gospel meetings, seminars, vacation Bible schools, service projects and get-togethers in one another’s homes are all wonderful. But we will never spend a better moment together than when we are engaged in prayer.

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