

Title: Embracing Our Greatest Privilege

Text: Various Texts

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Proverbs 4:7 tells us that *"The beginning of wisdom is this: to get wisdom and more than anything else, to get insight."* And so, if you have your copy of God's word with you today, and I hope you do, please turn to 1 John 5. Despite my absolute insane desire to return at last to our ongoing series in the Gospel of Luke, we're actually going to take our time this morning to explore topically a subject that I providentially have thought a lot about over the last two months as I've been laying on my back. And we get to talk today about one of the greatest privileges of the Christian life.

So, as you're turning to 1 John 5 this morning, which is where we'll begin, I would like to remind you of what we just heard this morning from 2 Chronicles 6 & 7, where Solomon dedicated the Jerusalem temple to the worship of God. If you remember, Solomon started that dedication off by gathering the entire congregation of Israel together and leading them in a rather grand and lengthy prayer of over 40 verses. And if you were to read it for yourself, that prayer simply asks God repeatedly for one single thing over and over again. And that single request that Solomon delivered over 12 times in that one passage was simply this, hear us. Hear us. Solomon brings the entire nation of Israel together to petition God 12 times for the simple request that whenever Israel cried out to him, God would hear and answer them no matter the circumstances that they faced. And then Solomon accompanied that simple request with a sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. That is enormous.

There was doubtless a near river of blood that flowed out of the Jerusalem temple courts that day in those sacrifices simply to ensure and to accompany the prayer that when they prayed, God would hear them. And yet as we saw this morning, the best answer that God was able to deliver to Solomon after all of those prayers, all of those songs, all of that sacrifice was simply to say, if you obey me, then I will hear an answer but if you don't, then I won't. Compare that to the passage I want you to look at in 1 John 5:14 and following. And it's so good, I'm going to read verse 13 as part of it.

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have towards him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him."

How glorious a promise is extended to us today, who have drawn near to God through faith in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. A sacrifice of far more infinite value than 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. Christ's perfect sacrifice gives a promise like this. If we ask anything according to his will, he what? Hears us.

Friends, I've said it before, and I'll say it again. Prayer is a privilege bought by Christ. Prayer is a privilege bought by Christ. To think that we can come to God who is the creator and sustainer and sovereign of this entire universe that we live in at any time and know that Christ, that in Christ he hears us and always will. That is an immense promise and an immense privilege that is unique to us in our day. Prayer is a privilege bought by Christ, one of the greatest privileges of the Christian life.

And so, this morning, I want to give a message on this privilege of prayer that we possess that I have learned much about over the last two months. How we as a church are planning to work towards embracing that privilege corporately beginning this fall. Our outline this morning is going to be very simple and it's going to be topical. It's very different than most of my sermons, I understand.

First, we're going to look at the mission of corporate prayer and how central praying together as members of a church is to our overall mission as a faith family. Then second, we're going to look at the magnitude of corporate prayer that we have far too small a view of what prayer looks like. And we need to expand our horizon and see all the diversity and variety of topics that scripture lays out for us to pursue in prayer. Third, we're going to observe the might of corporate prayer and how praying together as a church is accompanied by a powerful and a unique promise. And then finally, we're going to outline the mode of corporate prayer. That is the plan that we're going to pursue this fall to embrace more fully as a church body the promises of corporate prayer in our fellowship. And so that's our outline for this morning. We're going to look at the mission, magnitude, might, and mode of corporate prayer as we work together as a church to embrace our greatest privilege for the glory of God and for each other's good.

And so, with that in mind and in preparation for the teaching of God's word this morning, please pray with me.

Father, I thank you for this opportunity we have this morning to look at your word and to remember what an immense privilege it is when scripture says that in Jesus we have become a kingdom of priests to our God. That we don't need to come to anyone to approach you in prayer. That we can come direct to you through the person at work of your son Jesus Christ. Father, I thank you for how that one single truth of union with Jesus revolutionized the worship of the early church. And I pray that it would revolutionize our worship as a church as well. And recognize that when we come to church, we are not observers. We are to be participants in the fullness of worship, in the receiving of your word, in the fellowship, and in the prayers. So, Father, I pray that by your Spirit, you would lead us on level ground today for your honor and glory. And remind us of what a privilege we have in Christ to draw near to you today.

We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

So, the first aspect of corporate prayer that I want us all to consider this morning and I have to say first, I have been, again, I've been thinking about this for two months, okay. I am bursting at the seams. I'm going to be doing like on the spot editing of my sermon because I know I have way more that I want to share that I don't have time to share with you this morning. But this has been such an encouragement to my heart to meditate on. And I hope it is an encouragement for you as well.

And I want us to consider this morning first the mission of corporate prayer. Corporate prayer is essential to the mission of the local church. And therefore, it is essential to the mission of our body life here at Grace Chapel as well. It is what sets us apart. One of the ways that you know that we are a church and not just a country club is that all of us as members get together and we do this weird thing that the world looks at. We pray together. This is what makes a church a church. It's this utterly unique, that sets the local church apart from every other entity on planet earth. They are committed to pray together. It's been that way ever since the very beginning of the church. Acts 2:42 tells us that the believers of the early Jerusalem church, quote, *"continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* And so, if a church is to be a church at all, it is in its essence a group of redeemed and baptized individuals who have covenanted themselves together to faithfully engage as a united body in three core activities, Bible study, godly fellowship, culminating communion and prayer. This is what makes a church a church.

And this is why our church's stated mission in our Constitution is to glorify God through making, maturing, and mobilizing disciples of Jesus Christ through the word, throne, and fellowship of grace. And that's why corporate prayer is emphasized and repeated twice over in our church covenant. That we as members of Grace Chapel commit ourselves to assemble regularly, to pray with and for one another, sharing our burdens, sorrows, and joys, and to love and to pray for all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, we have that repeated in our church's core documents because we recognize that scripture teaches us that to be a faithful local church, we need to be about the issue of praying together. It is what is essential to making a church a church. Which is why we see this essential activity of corporate prayer clearly exhorted throughout the pages of the New Testament.

In fact, most of the commands to pray in the New Testament, you may not have realized this, were given to local churches. For example, at the end of 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul is in the middle of laying out numerous corporate commands to the congregation there in Thessalonica commands that they were carry out corporately together as a church. By the way, I have to admit my strength was less this week, so I don't have all the cross references up here. You're going to have to keep busy this morning, or you can come up and talk to me and I'll give you whatever ones you missed. But these were commands that they were to carry out of the church in Thessalonica together as a church. We know this is the case because when you're studying it, all of the you's in this passage are plural.

In other words, they would be saying y'all if they were from down south. And in other words, all of these commands that Paul gives in 1 Thessalonians 5 are clearly to be obeyed and carried out corporately together as a church body, like respect your leaders who are over y'all. How? Together corporately as a church. And to be at peace among y'all. How? Together corporately as a church. And to teach the word with all exhortation and encouragement and patience with y'all. How? Together corporately as a church.

And then in the middle of all these corporate commands, we have this plural command to pray. Paul says to the believers assembled there in Thessalonica and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, y'all *"rejoice always,"* y'all *"pray without ceasing,"* y'all *"give thanks in all circumstances."* How? Together corporately as a church. And why? Why should we? Why should y'all do all these things corporately together as a church? End of verse

13 or verse 18, *"for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for y'all."* It is God's will that all of us as a local church pray without ceasing corporately together as a church. And this exhortation for corporate prayer is repeated throughout the New Testament with repeated plural commands to local churches.

Just going to hit these really quick. Philippians 4:6, *"Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let all of y'all's requests be made known unto God."* How? Corporately together as a church. Ephesians 6:18 is the same as Paul was writing to the Ephesian believers in the church. *"Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.... making supplication for all the saints."* How? Together corporately as a church. And this is why the very first thing that the apostle Paul mentions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1 when it comes to God's plans for corporate worship Paul begins it all by saying, *"First of all.... pray."* Showing prayer's importance as the essential aspect of the corporate body life of the church. Corporate prayer is essential to the life and ministry of a local church.

That's why we see this being exhorted throughout the New Testament. This is why we also see it exemplified by the early church. It's not only exhorted as essential, but it's also exemplified as essential by the early church. Jesus tells his disciples if you remember right before his death and resurrection in Mark 11:17 that the Jerusalem temple was intended by God to be a house of what? Do you remember? *"A house of prayer for all nations."* And because it failed to produce this fruit, which is exactly what the parable of the fig tree teaches in Mark 11, because the temple failed to produce this fruit, God replaced it with a new house of worship, the church, which has now become the place of corporate prayer for all nations. And we in America have entered into that house of worship. And so, you see this truth exemplified throughout the recorded history of the early church.

Just a cursory glance through the book of Acts shows you that the whole church was engaged in corporate prayer together as an entire body at the creation and the birth of the local church in Acts 1 & 2, during and after momentous events in each other's lives in Acts 4 & 12, and whenever leaders were chosen or sent out in Acts 6 & 13. During all these moments and more, the early church would come together and pray corporately together as a body. And those times of corporate prayer were not just one person praying everything on behalf of everybody else and everybody just sitting there saying amen. No, these were churchwide, lay led, member participated times of prayer.

Acts 1:14 tells us that after Jesus ascended, the disciples and others were all joined together constantly in prayer. This was the whole group praying, not just one or two. In Acts 2:42, it makes clear that this devotion to prayer continued as a core community wide practice listed right alongside corporate teaching and corporate fellowship. Then in Acts 4:23-31, after Peter and John were released, we're told that the whole church community prayed together out loud. As Acts 4:24 says, *"they raised their voices together to God."* In other words, everyone participated and then we're told the Holy Spirit filled the whole place. Everyone who prayed was empowered. And then finally, in Acts 12:12, when Peter was in prison, we're told that *"many people had gathered and were praying at Mary's house,"* a planned, deliberate churchwide prayer meeting.

See, the early church seizing upon this glorious reality of the equality and priesthood of all believers, this early church would pray together corporately as a body with the gathered membership engaged as active participants. This is why James in one of the earliest writings in the New Testament writes this in James 5:16, *"confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."* Right from the very beginning, there was an assumed act of participation from the membership of local churches in the events of corporate prayer. This is what we see repeatedly exemplified by the early church. So corporate prayer is essential to our mission as a local church, which is why we see it exhorted and exemplified throughout scripture.

Friends, I can't say it any more plainly than this. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us. This is the mission of corporate prayer. This is what it means to be uniquely a church and individually members of it. We pray and we pray together. That is essential. It is exhorted. It is exemplified. But if we're to be honest, most church members struggle with corporate prayer, not because they think that it's not commanded or demonstrated in scripture. Most church members, I think, struggle with engaging in corporate prayer because they think it's boring. Oh, if I come to the time of corporate prayer, it'll just be a long recitation of people's latest hospital visits.

As one pastor famously put it, we spend all of our time praying to keep saints out of heaven rather than praying to get sinners in. If that's something that you've struggled with when it comes to times of corporate prayer, I want you to know that God agrees with you. And that there is so much more to what local churches like ours can and should be doing in corporate prayer than what you living in 21st century America might be familiar with. And so that's where I want to move on from the mission of corporate prayer we just describe briefly to the magnitude of corporate prayer. Friends, there is a glorious diversity of approaches that scripture calls on us to take when it comes to drawing near to our great redeeming God in prayer as a church. And only a very small degree of it has to do with actually asking God for anything.

I'm assuming most of us have heard about the a.c.t.s. approach to prayer. If not, it's a helpful tool for prayer because it's right, not only in terms of its points, but in its priorities. First, we are called on in scripture to just adore God in prayer. And I want you to think about this just in your own prayer life for a moment as we're going through this and before we apply it corporately. How much do these elements take place in your own prayer life? First, we are called on scripture just to adore God in prayer. Psalms 29:2 says, *"Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness."* Have you ever just thanked God for who he is in and of himself? That's what prayer is supposed to be about. It is to be preeminently an act of worship to God, praising him for who he is.

Second, we are called to confess to God in prayer. In other words, as we look upon God and who he is, we ought to be reminded of who we are in light of that. Daniel 4:4-19 demonstrates we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and rebelled. Lord, we are covered with shame. We are to confess our creatureliness and our sinfulness to God. The natural response of reflecting on God's glory in prayer should be confessing our own falling short of that glory as well. We should adore God in prayer. We should confess to God in prayer. We should give thanks to God in prayer also.

You know, it's so easy just to jump into a long list of complaints to God, isn't it? Of just things that we want, rather than taking the time first and foremost to thank God for the things he's already given. I think this is one of the things the Lord has taught me over the last several months, that there is a whole list of so many wonderful good gifts that if we were to recite them all, we would never come to an end of them. Hebrews 13:15 says, *"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise that is the fruit of lips that acknowledges his name."* The supernatural consequence of being someone who is united to Christ ought to be thanksgiving. We should adore God in prayer. We should confess to God in prayer. We should give thanks to God in prayer.

And then finally, scripture calls us to give supplication to God in prayer. That is, we should just ask him for things. And even here, there's a huge variety of what we should pray for. After all, if you've been a part of our Wednesday night studies at all, two years ago we spent a long time going through Paul's prayers throughout the New Testament. Did you know that Paul offers up nearly 70 different examples or instructions on prayer throughout the New Testament, and only one out of 70 has anything to do with physical needs? That shows us that we have a huge opportunity as a local church, even in asking for things in prayer, to pray for things that are far beyond the things that we can see and touch. As we'll discover soon in Jesus' prayer later in Luke 11, Jesus leads us to pray for five categories, only one of which is physical. And even that request is to hang off of a greater desire for God's glory and God's kingdom to advance. And so, we ought to be adoring, confessing, thanking, and giving supplication to God in prayer in a vast variety of ways.

And so, this is the magnitude of corporate prayer, that there are whole vistas to be claimed in prayer for God's glory and for our church family that we and most churches have never even set our toes upon. You've gotten a taste of that, I think, if you've been looking at our prayer bulletin, how it's changed recently. That there's a whole diversity of topics now that we are being called on as a church to engage in in prayer for the glory of God. And so, what can compel us into this great essential mission of corporate prayer when most other churches bow out? I think remembering the magnitude of corporate prayer helps that there is a whole world to explore corporately when it comes to our prayers as a church. We'll never be bored about do we have something to pray for. But I also think the great promise that accompanies corporate prayer helps as well, which is what we're looking at next. We've seen the mission and the magnitude of corporate prayer.

Next, let's consider the might of corporate prayer. And I think this is the point that excites me the most. See, we all know from James 5:16, the promise that says this, *"The prayer of a righteous person,"* that is a person who has been made righteous through faith in Christ Jesus, *"the prayer of a believer has great power as it is working."* Now, that one verse there has some awesome promises regarding prayer just as a basic level. First, James teaches here that the prayers of a believer always work. James says without qualification, *"it is working."* Friend, can you be encouraged by that this morning? You have never prayed a dud in your life, ever. The worst prayer you have ever prayed was embraced by God the Father in heaven as eagerly as Christ's own supplications are. It is always working.

Second, your prayers as a believer have power, we're told. James says great power as it is working. So, we all know the power of prayer generally, but what about the power of prayer corporately? See, when it comes to scripture's call for corporate prayer, as we've been considering this morning, we can often start to think, if we're not careful, that corporate prayer is ineffective or at least unnecessary. In other words, let me put it this way, some of you might be sitting here this morning thinking, okay, I understand, pastor, but if all of us just went back to our own homes and prayed individually on our own, that would be the same as if we all came together and prayed anyway, right? Wrong.

See, listen, most people don't know this, and it's not taught very often in churches, but corporate prayer actually comes with some very unique and special promises. And the first and most important one that I want you to consider this morning is found in 2 Corinthians 1:11. 2 Corinthians 1:11, in 2 Corinthians, and you can go ahead and turn there. In 2 Corinthians, this is kind of like the one verse that's been sticking out to me this whole time. 2 Corinthians 1:11. Here Paul is describing a trial that has driven him to the absolute end of himself and of his strength, a trial that made him feel like he was at death's doorway. He tells the Corinthians in verses 8-9 of chapter 1 of 2 Corinthians, *"For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death."* But then almost inexplicably, Paul follows that up with an absolute confidence that he will ultimately be delivered of that burden.

He says in verse 10, *"he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again."* And so, you say, how in the world, Paul, how can you have this level of confidence in spite of everything that's been happening to you? Well, the answer is Paul knew God's person and God knew God's means. First, Paul knew God's person. He says in verse 10, *"On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again."* Paul knew God to be a saving God who delights to save his people. As 1 Timothy 4:10 says, *"he is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe."* Scripture is full of examples of God saving people by supernatural miraculous means, especially on behalf of those who are his. And so, Paul's hope was set on that. He knew God's person, but he also knew God's means.

That often God accomplishes his sovereign and saving purposes through and sometimes not until the prayers of many. Paul writes to the gathered church there in Corinth, verse 11, chapter 1, *"You also must help us."* It is necessary in God's saving plan and purposes that you actually involve yourself in it, that you help us. How? *"By prayer."* By prayer you enter into God's saving plan and purposes *"so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted to us."* How? What does it say? *"Through the prayers of,"* what, *"many."* Can I just read that verse again? *"You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks and give glory to God on our behalf for the blessing granted to us through the prayers of many."* Paul there clearly demonstrates how he knows God is going to help him and how he's going to demonstrate his saving power. He says, I know God is going to help me. How? Through your help by prayer. He knows he's going to be helped through as he says, *"the blessing that is granted to us through the prayers of many."* Friends, there are certain blessings and helps that God has ordained are only granted when many people pray.

We often think about God's answers to prayers like a traffic light, right. This is the quintessential example that you give kids, right. Red light, green light, yellow light. Sometimes God says no. Sometimes God says yes. Sometimes God says not yet. But I think there's actually a fourth option here, a fourth answer that's given here according to this verse. Yes, but not until. Not until many people pray. There is something powerful that happens when believers come together and agree upon something in prayer, blessings that are only given through the prayers of many. Jesus hints at this in Matthew 18:19 when he says, *"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven."* Something powerful happens when believers assemble and agree upon something together in prayer. There are some blessings that are only given through the prayers of many. And scripture has many examples that demonstrate this.

I wonder if this is actually one of the main reasons between what you see in the church in America and what you see in the church overseas. I think the church overseas gets this. I think the church in America is so individualized, they don't see this. There are some answers and blessings that are given through the prayers of many. Scripture gives many examples. Let me just give you two this morning. Boy, I wish I had time to teach through all of this. Here we go.

2 Corinthians 20. I'm sorry, 2 Chronicles 20. What happens in that story is an alliance of three empires rise up and descend suddenly upon the nation of Judah as one in overwhelming numbers. And in 2 Chronicles 20, holy smokes, what just happened? There we go. 2 Chronicles 20, we're told a great multitude had driven right into the very heart of Israel. All the way up to Ein Gedi, along the Dead Sea, and the people of God were absolutely powerless to stop them. They were a belief, by the way, this is Judah, they were a believing country at that time. They were under a godly king, they were praying, they were fighting. But no Israelite individually could stand up against this, could withstand him.

And so, under the call of King Jehoshaphat, we're told in verse 4 that all Judah assembled, *"All Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord; from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord."* And then Jehoshaphat cries out in verse 12, *"We are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."* And then while that happens, we're told in verse 13, *"Meanwhile all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children."* From the babies all the way up, they came before the Lord and petitioned him as one body in prayer.

Well, the next morning the men of Israel get up to fight, they go out to fight and it says that when Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked upon the horde and behold, here's a shock, there were dead bodies everywhere laying on the ground and none had escaped. The enemy had all turned on each other and died. And then we're told that the people of Judah renamed that Valley of Battle, they renamed it as the Valley of Blessing. Why? It's because they discovered the unique blessings that sometimes only come when many people pray.

Something powerful happens when believers assemble, when living stones join themselves together into a house of worship and they agree upon something together in prayer. There are unique blessings that God has ordained will only come through the prayers of many. And lest you think this is just an Old Testament

example, we're actually presented in Acts 12 with a very similar parallel situation as 2 Chronicles 20. In Acts 12 we're told that *"Herod the king laid violent hands upon the church And he killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also."* And Luke tells us that this all happened during the feast of unleavened bread. So, Herod has the approval at this moment from both the Romans and the Jews to do all of these things during the holy days of leading up to the Passover feast. And Herod has been given the go-ahead to remove the leaven of Christianity from Jerusalem. And so, he plans to carry it out as soon as Passover concludes, beginning with Peter, he's the next one who's going to be killed. God's people are believing, God's people are praying, but no one can withstand Herod.

And then we're told in verse 5, *"So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church."* As verse 12 says, *"they all met in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, and there many gathered together and prayed."* And you know the story, that very night, the night before Peter's scheduled execution, the very night they all prayed together, Peter was miraculously delivered. Behold, here's a surprise, he comes knocking on the door and no one believed it until finally verse 16 says, *"But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened it, they saw him and were amazed."* And guess what? In anger, Herod turns on his own sentries and kills them. And then the very next passage says he withdraws to Caesarea where he himself dies. But we're told the word of God increased and multiplied. God's people were uniquely blessed.

These are just two examples from scripture that teach us that something powerful happens when believers assemble and agree upon something together in prayer, whether it be the stories of Esther or Israel or Antioch. There are unique blessings that God has ordained will only come through the prayers of many. This is the might of corporate prayer. Sometimes God's answer to prayer is yes. Sometimes it is no. Sometimes it is yes, but not yet. And sometimes it is yes, but not until, not until many people pray. When God's people can come together and agree on an issue and petition the Lord together on behalf of that issue, something special happens.

Many will give thanks, give glory to God on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. And so, we are called together as a church to this great mission of corporate prayer. And what can compel us into this great mission when other churches bow out? The magnitude of corporate prayer helps. That there's a whole world to explore corporately when it comes to our prayers. I think the might of corporate prayer helps. That the promises, thinking of the promises that await us when many people pray.

And then finally, in application, I think the mode that we take when it comes to corporate prayer can help compel us as well. So, after seeing the mission, magnitude, and might of corporate prayer, I want to apply all this by considering, last, the mode of corporate prayer. We all know what corporate prayer looks like, right. You come in the evening, and you sit, and you hear something that sounds more like a sermon than a prayer meeting for about 45 minutes, right, and then you hear someone read it off, and then you meet up with a couple of people and you're praying. This is prayer, right. Wrong. Not necessarily. Not at all, and not what we see in scripture.

In other words, I think that there's a way that we can do this practically. There is a way that we can engage in the mission of corporate prayer that encourages and excites the next generation of our church into this mission of advancing God's glory through prayer. And that is by remembering that prayer often has a complementing partner, and that partner is praise. We see this all over scripture. Just think about the book of Psalms and why it is so beloved. It is literally an entire song book. It is prayer and praise put together, and it complements the experience. It's like coffee and creamer or peanut butter and jelly. They're better together. I'm sorry if you like black coffee. It's just not normal.

Think about 1 Corinthians 14:15. Paul says, *"What am I to do?"* In other words, he's asking the question, what should I do when I come to corporate worship with God's people? And he gives the answer. He says, *"I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I'll sing praise with my mind also."* Notice Paul parallels his response to God of prayer and praise there side by side as complementary partners in corporate worship. And Paul's not the only one. James, I'm getting ahead of myself, James writes nearly at the end of his book in James 5:13, *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone among you cheerful? Let him sing songs of praise."* In other words, there again you see prayer and praise put side by side as complementary partners in corporate worship, and indeed as the full expression of godly corporate worship and fellowship. And that's why you see them join yet again even in heaven. So, you can't get away from it.

Revelation 5:8-9, where we're told there that *"the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb in worship."* And we're told that in their worship, while they were *"holding up golden bowls of incense filled with the prayers of the saints. They sang a new song to the Lamb and to the one who is seated on the throne."* Prayer and praise put together even in heaven, complementary partners that make everything better. I think that is why we often see churches in our day who don't necessarily agree with us theologically, particularly when it comes to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, still putting prayer and praise together in worship. And I think it's because they've stumbled onto something. I think they've stumbled onto something thoroughly biblical. Is that prayer and praise belong together.

And so, I think one of the ways that we can raise up this next generation to understand and engage in this essential ministry of prayer as a church is by putting these two complementary partners, prayer and praise together for our church. We live in a culture where everybody understands that when you're singing songs, you're worshiping, right. But they have a hard time thinking the same thing when it comes to prayer. And so, the way that the Bible corrects this misunderstanding and shows us that prayer is an essential aspect of worship for the church as well is by putting it side by side with praise.

And so that's what we're going to do starting this fall. On Sunday, September 13th, we are going to begin a new Sunday evening worship experience called Uplift. It's going to be an uplifting time of worship where we lift up, see what I did there, prayers and praises together as a family of faith. And we're going to engage in this mission of corporate prayer with all the colorful magnitude that scripture describes through combining prayer and praise together and stepping through the Acts prayer model together as a church in that way. And so let me tell you how this is going to work.

First, starting at 6 p.m. on September 13th, after an opening prayer and brief scriptural focus for the night, we're going to begin to adore God publicly as a church through prayers of adoration, followed by a complimenting praise song of adoration. And then we're going to confess to God in prayer privately through private prayers of confession, followed by an appropriate praise song of gospel confession. And then we're going to give thanks to God publicly as a church through a couple of public testimonies delivered by the membership, followed by a praise song of thanksgiving. And then finally, we're going to give supplication to God in prayer publicly.

As several individuals scheduled in advance will pray for one prayer request highlighted from our prayer sheet for that week. That ranges in topics from the spiritual health of our fellowship to outreach and evangelism, global missions, the discipleship of our children, long-term needs of the body, upcoming ministries, and so much more. And then we're going to finish with one final song of uplifting praise to God. And so, this is how we're planning to engage anew in the mission, magnitude, and might of corporate prayer together as a church during our next season as a church. I'm so excited and I think it's going to be great as I have seen several aspects and iterations of this done very well at Master Seminary in California as well as Capitol Hills in Washington, D.C. and several other places.

And I hope that in a very helpful sense, this will detonate many people's preconceived ideas of what corporate prayer looks like and will show that according to scripture's instructions, corporate prayer can be dynamic, it can be exciting, it can be uplifting, it can be encouraging as it should be, and it has the potential to be absolutely transformative as God bestows his blessings upon us through the prayers of many. And so, this is where you all come in in all of this because this corporate time of prayer is being designed to be corporate. So, the application of this message is simply this: devote yourself to this mission that I pray I have faithfully delivered to you this morning. Just like the believers in the early church did in Acts 2:42, devote yourself to the corporate prayers of our gathered church. And there are three ways that all of us can do this. Three ways that all of us can do this.

First, be present. Be present during our times of corporate prayer. Come to Uplift on Sunday, September 13th. We're going to start at 6 p.m. because we don't want to keep anyone out too late, and we just want you to come and participate and be present. I understand that that may require you to change what Sunday nights normally look like for you. But can I tell you, as someone who's just lived through the last three months of my life, sometimes a shake-up is good to your schedule. Sometimes it's good. And it might be. And it is also one of the most fundamental ways an individual can support the biblical mission of their church and be blessed by doing so. It's simply by being present. And so, I'd encourage you all, please come to Uplift here at church on Sunday night, September 13th at 6 p.m. Sing songs of praise among the congregation of the righteous and join with and enter into the prayers of others as they lift up on our behalf our church's longings and burdens before the throne of God. So that's the first most basic way that you can support this mission, is just by being present.

The second way that you can devote yourself to this and support to this mission is not only to be present during our times of corporate prayer, but I also encourage you to participate. Participate in our times of corporate prayer. We are designing this time of corporate prayer to be just that corporate, to be

churchwide, and we are wanting as many individuals in our church to participate in this as possible. And that's why we've scheduled it for Sunday nights, so that it does not conflict with any other church activities other than combined nursery for childcare so that everyone can participate. One of the things, now this is just me speaking personally, one of the things I am most looking forward to about this, that I am most excited about, is first this Wednesday for the first time I've been here, I get to go around and say hello to all the children in Children's Church. I get to step in and show my face in youth group, whether they want to see my face or not, and I get to be among them.

And then the second thing I'm most excited about is on this Sunday night, I'm excited to have children and youth praying alongside parents and adults on Sunday nights. I'm excited to have seven-year-olds praying in the way that only seven-year-olds can, on behalf of our church, just as I am just as excited to hear 70-year-olds praying on behalf of our church before the Lord in ways that only a 70-year-old can. I cannot wait to hear prayers and testimonies coming out of the mouth of babes as well as the mouth of the faithful, to have the whole lifeblood of our church represented in one single dynamic service of worship. On Sunday mornings, we will hear the word of God taught, we will be spoken to. On Sunday nights, we will speak back to God as a church. I cannot wait. On Sunday mornings, we will receive the word. On Sunday evenings, we will respond to it.

And so, there's a way that you can help us with that, and that's not only by being present, but also participating. See, for each uplift worship service, we're going to need about 12 participants a night for our prayers and testimonies. And that will break down by different ways, whether it be, you know, four people for the prayers of adoration, two people for giving a testimony, six people helping with the appointed prayer requests. It's about 12 people a night. And so, we started to collect a team. You've been hearing about it on Sunday mornings, I know from announcements, a list of names of people who would be willing to participate in this endeavor. We've collected these names so that they can be scheduled in advance. That way, each person will know specifically what they're praying for a week in advance and can even know generally that they're being asked to pray or participate in one of those three ways even further in advance than that. That way, no one's surprised, and everyone has a time to think about what they want to say on Sunday night in prayer and in testimony.

And so, we've already got a list of close to 60 people who have signed up who are willing to be scheduled and participate in this way, which is awesome. But this morning, we're wanting to extend that invitation to all of you who are here today. Would you be willing to be another member of our church body that participates in lifting up a brief one-to-two-minute prayer or testimony on Sunday nights when we gather together? We started building this team with the leaders of our church with the elders and the deacons and the staff members. We since extended it to the husbands and the fathers, and now we want to extend the invitation to join our uplift prayer and testimony team to all of you. We want the whole church body represented in this meeting. We want the whole body represented, husbands and wives, single and married, youth group and college students, senior saints and even children. We want this worship service of prayers and praises to be reflection of all of us.

And so, I would encourage you, if you want to serve in this way, to sign up in the foyer or in the church app. You can even use the QR code that's up here now and join us in not only being present, but by actively participating in this time of worship. Let your voice be heard among the congregation of the righteous before the throne of God. Like the believers in the early church let's devote ourselves to the support of this mission by being present for corporate prayer, participating in corporate prayer, and finally by partnering in corporate prayer. Partner with our times of corporate prayer.

To start up a prayer and praise service requires individuals willing to support that endeavor, not only through giving prayers and testimonies themselves, but also in ways like playing the music surrounding the prayers and the testimonies, giving microphones to the people who are about to give a prayer and testimony, or watching the infants and the toddlers of those families who are willing to come and give up prayers and testimonies on behalf of the church. It takes a whole church to help a churchwide service of worship come together. And so even if you're uncomfortable to sign up directly to do prayers and testimonies, I'd still encourage you to reach out to the church office this week and express your desire to partner up with this mission of corporate prayer by supporting specifically our music, our tech, or our children's ministries during these times in the ways that you are able.

Because prayer is a privilege bought by Christ and God has sovereignly ordained some blessings to only be given when many people pray. And so, Grace Chapel, let's lay hold of this mighty privilege and promise of prayer together in all its great magnitude. Let's be present, let's participate, and let's partner up this fall in this mission of corporate prayer together for the glory of God. For who knows what God might do in our midst when many people pray.

This is the word of God, which I consider a great privilege to have been able to share with you today, which I now commit to your further study for the glory of God and your faithful obedience until Christ, who is our hope, appears.

To that end let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your word. And as we have heard from you, Father, as we have received your word on the importance of this mission, its magnitude, its might, and the mode that we're planning to approach this in. Father, as we have received your word, help us now to commit ourselves to respond to it for your honor and glory. Father, I pray that you would receive much glory from our church body in years to come, because in this moment, we committed ourselves to being a church that would give you much thanks and praise and glory for the blessings that you give us through the prayers of many. Work within us.

We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

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