

OUR LIFE TOGETHER

Fellowship in Prayer and Song

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In our series of lessons entitled "Our Life Together" we've been focusing on various aspects of FELLOWSHIP revealed in the pages of Scripture.
 - A. And in our LAST lesson (last Sunday morning) we began looking at how we fellowship together in WORSHIP.
 1. We started by defining WORSHIP, and learned that the HEBREW and GREEK word for WORSHIP carries the idea of expressing DEEP LOVE and ADMIRATION to God, while at the same time showing DEEP REVERENCE and HUMILITY.
 2. We also learned that we are to worship God in "*SPIRIT*," which means to worship Him with: "the highest, deepest, noblest part of our humanity, the point of contact between God and man."
 - a. In fact, Jesus said, "*the Father is seeking such to worship Him.*" (**John 4:23**)
 3. And we concluded that WORSHIP should NEVER be done CASUALLY or with a FLIPPANT or SUPERFICIAL ATTITUDE, but done with the GREATEST and DEEPEST sense of REVERENCE, AWE and ADORATION we can possibly muster.

- B. However, in THIS lesson and in the lessons to follow we want to take a close look at the various WAYS in which we fellowship together as we worship the God of heaven and honor His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.
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- II. If you remember from our last study together, we learned that one definition of fellowship is to "jointly participate together in some activity."
 - A. And TWO WAYS we have FELLOWSHIP in WORSHIP, or "jointly participate together" in WORSHIP, are through "PRAYER" and in "SONG."
 - 1. BOTH involve expressions of praise and devotion to God.
 - 2. And both help nourish fellowship among believers.
 - B. Therefore, in this study we want to answer two questions about "prayer" and in "singing."
 - 1. First, how do these two ways of worshipping God help ENHANCE fellowship between us as believers?
 - 2. And, are we getting the MOST out of "prayer" and in "singing" in our worship?

BODY:

- I. Let's begin by opening our Bibles to the New Testament book of Acts, because it's here that we see just how important worship was to these New Testament Christians.
 - A. For example, immediately following the establishment of the Lord's church on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believers regularly assembled to fellowship together in worship.
 1. **Acts 2:42-47** – *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*
 - a. The phrases in **verse 42** that indicates fellowship together in WORSHIP are: *"they continued steadfastly in the apostles'*

doctrine [the teaching and preaching of the apostles] *and fellowship* [gathering together to jointly encourage one another], *in the breaking of bread* [the observance of the Lord's Supper], *and in prayers* [offering up praise and thanksgiving to God]."

- b. The phrase in **verse 46** that indicates fellowship together in WORSHIP is that they were: "*continuing daily with one accord in the temple* [the public place where they assembled to worship God]."
- c. And the phrase in **verse 47** that indicates fellowship together in WORSHIP is the fact that they were continually "*praising God.*"

B. And as persecution against these believers in Christ began to intensify, their response was to gather together to encourage one another in fellowship and in worship.

- 1. In **Acts chapter 4**, immediately after the Peter and John were arrested and threatened by the Sanhedrin to never again preach or teach the name of Jesus Christ, were told:

- a. **Acts 4:23-31** – *And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised*

their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ.' 27 "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

2. In **Acts chapter 12**, after Herod had ordered the death of James, the brother of John, he had Peter arrested and thrown into prison, with obvious plans to execute him.

- a. Notice the reaction of the church: *Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. (Acts 12:5)*
 - b. Later that night, after Peter was miraculously released from prison by an angel of the Lord, he immediately went to the house of Mary, the mother of John-Mark: *where many were gathered together praying. (Acts 12:12)*
- C. And in **Acts chapter 16**, even when it was impossible to fellowship with several other believers to worship, Paul and Silas still worshipped together deep in the recesses of a Philippian prison while their feet were fastened in stocks.
1. **Acts 16:25** – *But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*
- D. Although we see several examples of New Testament Christians praying together, and even an example where Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God while imprisoned, the question that naturally comes to mind is WHY?
1. Why were PRAYER and SINGING so VITALLY IMPORTANT when it came to offering PRAISE and THANKSGIVING to God, and why would we find THESE two ways of worshipping God being used in times of GREAT DISTRESS?

II. I believe there are SEVERAL reasons why PRAYER and SINGING played such an important part of the worship of New Testament Christians.

A. ONE reason why PRAYER was so important was simply because of the great VALUE and BENEFITS of prayer – ESPECIALLY when prayers are offered COLLECTIVELY by a group of Christians praying together.

1. Prayer is a WONDERFUL source of STENGTH and PEACE:

a. **Philippians 4:6-7** – *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

2. Prayer has such GREAT POWER when believers pray together.

a. **Matthew 18:19-20** – *"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

b. **James 5:16** – *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

- c. If the effective, fervent prayer of only ONE righteous man avails much, just imagine the POWER behind the effective, fervent prayers of MANY righteous.

B. And when it comes to SINGING, there are GREAT BENEFITS associated with THIS form of worship as well – ESPECIALLY when SONGS of praise are offered COLLECTIVELY by a group of Christians singing together.

1. Singing is certainly appropriate as an INDIVIDUAL expression of praise, but when done together, it becomes a WONDERFUL SOURCE of STRENGTH and EDIFICATION.

- a. **Colossians 3:16** – *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

- b. When done collectively, singing becomes a way of teaching and admonishing one another.

- c. Vine says: "The difference between 'admonish' and 'teach' seems to be that, whereas the former (admonish) has mainly in view the things that are wrong and call for warning, the latter (teach) has to do chiefly with the impartation of positive truth..." (Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words)

- d. Therefore, the songs we sing together touch our hearts in two ways:
 - (1). By reminding us of things we may need to change in our lives, and...
 - (2). By being words of great encouragement, reminding us of the wonderful blessings we have in Christ.
- e. This is why the apostle Paul told the church at Ephesus that they should be, *speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs...* **(Ephesians 5:19)**
 - (1). We are NOT just singing praises to GOD, we are ALSO singing to ONE ANOTHER – speaking words of admonition and encouragement to ONE ANOTHER.
- 2. Singing is also a wonderful means of expressing the GRACE of God that fills our hearts.
 - a. What do you think Paul mean when he said we should be *""singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord""*? **(Colossians 3:16)**
 - b. Thayer says the word GRACE (Gr: 'charis'): "is used of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and

kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues."

(Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon)

- c. In other words, when we sing with GRACE in our hearts to the Lord, we are expressing thanksgiving to God for the GRACE we have received, and by which we are saved.
 - d. But the grace we RECEIVED also FILLS OUR HEARTS and governs the way we respond to others – we teach and admonish one another with a GRACE-FILLED HEART.
3. Singing is ALSO a natural expression of a heart filled with the POWER and INFLUENCE of the Holy Spirit through the Spirit-given Word.
- a. **Colossians 3:16** – *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs...*
 - b. **Ephesians 5:18-19** – ...be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs
 - c. A heart filled with the POWER and INFLUENCE of the Holy Spirit is a heart that SINGS for JOY – it's a heart that cannot contain its joy any longer and therefore RELEASES that joy in SONG!!

- d. **Psalm 27:6** – David said: *Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.*
 - e. **Psalm 66:1-4** – **Make a joyful shout to God**, all the earth! **2 Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious.** **3** Say to God, "How awesome are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power Your enemies shall submit themselves to You. **4** All the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You; they shall sing praises to Your name."
 - f. Those are hearts FILLED WITH the SPIRIT and FILLED with the JOY of salvation that comes through God's GRACE!
- C. There's NO QUESTION about the fact that the early church took advantage of the full BLESSINGS and JOY found in PRAYER and SONG.
- 1. They not only prayed and sang as INDIVIDUALS, but COLLECTIVELY as well when they assembled together to fellowship in WORSHIP and a time of PRAISE to God.
 - 2. As a result, their FELLOWSHIP together was STRENGTHENED.

3. But what about the church today? Are WE allowing the POWER of PRAYER and SONG to strengthen OUR fellowship together in the body of Christ?

III. What can we do to strengthen and enhance OUR FELLOWSHIP together through PRAYER and SINGING? Let me suggest several things here:

A. To make prayer and singing meaningful in our WORSHIP, they must FIRST be a regular part of our PRIVATE times of devotion.

1. Perhaps one of the greatest sources of strength and encouragement is when we spend time ALONE with God, and yet this is one thing far too many Christians DON'T DO.
2. We CONSTANTLY see times of private prayer and devotion to God in the life of JESUS.
 - a. **Matthew 14:23** – *And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray.*
 - b. **Mark 1:35-36** – *Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.*
 - c. **Luke 5:16** – *So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.*

- d. **Luke 6:12-13** – *Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*
 - e. **Mark 14:32-35** – *Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. 34 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch." 35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him.*
3. If JESUS found it necessary to spend time alone with God in prayer, just think how much MORE we need to spend time alone with God.
 4. And once again, what do we see Paul and Silas doing when they are locked in stocks in the deepest part of a Philippian prison? They were "**praying** and **singing** hymns to God." (**Acts 16:25**)
 5. When we spend time alone with God we have privacy to pour out the DEEPEST EXPRESSIONS of JOY or of NEED or of SORROW and REPENTANCE.

- a. **Matthew 6:6** – *But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

B. Another thing we can do to make prayer and singing meaningful in our WORSHIP is to pray and sing with the spirit – "the highest, deepest, noblest part of our humanity, the point of contact between God and man." (**John 4:23-24**)

1. **1 Corinthians 14:15** – in dealing with the misuse of spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul said: *What is the conclusion then? I will **pray** with the **spirit** [the highest, deepest, noblest part of our humanity, the point of contact between God and man], and I will also pray with the understanding. I will **sing** with the **spirit** [the highest, deepest, noblest part of our humanity, the point of contact between God and man], and I will also sing with the understanding.*

- a. Worship that is NOT done in SPIRIT [with the highest, deepest, noblest part of our humanity, the point of contact between God and man] is simply NOT acceptable to God.
- b. Our hearts and minds need to be TOTALLY and COMPLETELY involved in our worship – ESPECIALLY when

we PRAY to the God of heaven, and SING psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to one another and in PRAISE to God.

- c. If our minds are ELSEWHERE when we pray and sing, then our worship is simply VAIN – we're just going through the motions, and are no different than the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned for their vain worship.
2. So how can we pray and sing with the spirit?
 - a. When someone is praying we need to LISTEN to that prayer and make it OUR prayer as well, OR take that time to offer our OWN prayer to God.
 - b. When we sing we need to sing from the heart – singing and making melody in the heart.
 - (1). WE might be impressed by someone's beautiful voice, but I don't think that necessarily impresses God.
 - (2). God is more interested in the melody that rises out of our hearts than He is in the melody that comes from our lips.
 - (3). SING OUT! Let your songs be expressions of JOY and THANKSGIVING that come direct from your HEART.
 3. Pray and sing IN SPIRIT – from the highest, deepest, noblest part of your humanity, the point of contact between YOU and GOD!

- C. Another thing we can do to make prayer and singing meaningful in our WORSHIP is to pray and sing TOGETHER EVERY OPPORTUNITY we have.
1. I know I'm going to get in trouble for saying this, but if I didn't occasionally reprove and rebuke then I wouldn't be doing the job the Lord expects of me as a gospel preacher.
 2. Please don't fall into the trap of looking at our MONTHLY SINGINGS on Sunday evenings as a convenient time to miss worship.
 - a. "Oh, it's only a singing!"
 3. How WRONG it is to think that way! It's not JUST a singing. It's a time of WORSHIP where we come together to TEACH and ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with GRACE in our hearts to the LORD!
 4. Let me ask you this. The Bible makes several references in both the Old and New Testament to singing in heaven. When you get to heaven, and the angels of heaven and the redeemed of all the earth gather around the Throne to offer praise in SONG to God and to Jesus Christ, would you even DARE to THINK in your heart, "Oh, it's only a singing!"?

5. And let me ask another question. What ever happened to PRAYER meetings?
 - a. Why have we stopped gathering together just to PRAY?
 - b. I remember occasions when the WHOLE WORSHIP TIME was devoted to just PRAYER, with a few songs at the beginning and at the end.
 - c. Why do we have SINGINGS and not PRAYER MEETINGS?
6. One of the most spiritually uplifting times I ever spent (and I know some of you who have had similar experiences) was when a group of Christian men got together to JUST PRAY.
 - a. One man was selected to BEGIN the prayer, and another was selected to END the prayer.
 - b. And in between, each and every man in the assembly who wanted to pray would just wait for someone to pause, and then begin praying THEIR prayer before the assembly.
 - c. And when he paused, another would begin until virtually every man in the group who WANTED to pray had the opportunity.
 - d. Finally, after all those who wanted to pray had prayed, the man selected to CLOSE the prayer offered his prayer in closing.

- e. When that time of prayer ended, I looked up and watched grown men wiping tears from their eyes – and I was one of them..
 - f. When was the last time you had a prayer experience like THAT?
7. Brethren, we need to have times of fellowship together when ALL we do is sing and pray.
8. If it was good enough for the saints in Jerusalem meeting in Mary's house to pray for Peter, and if it was good enough for Paul and Silas while in prison, then it ought to be good enough for us. Wouldn't you agree?

CONCLUSION:

- I. Tonight in our studies in the book of James, I'm going to talk a little about **James 5:13** where James wrote: *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms."*
 - A. But let me say this about that passage now.
 - 1. Times of SUFFERING and times of great JOY are times when we should be praying and singing.
 - 2. But, in context, the praying and singing James is talking about are times of PRIVATE prayer and singing.

- a. James said when they are SUFFERING they need to go to God in private prayer.
 - b. And when they are filled with inexpressible JOY, they need to lift their voices to God in private song.
3. Nothing provides greater reassurance in times of suffering than going to God in prayer.
 4. And nothing brings greater happiness than expressing the joy of our heart to God in song.
- B. But Paul said we are ALSO to *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."* (**Romans 12:15**)
1. There comes a time when we need to rejoice together WITH those who rejoice, and when we need to weep together WITH those who weep.
 - a. These are PUBLIC expressions of joy and sorrow.
 2. So, what better way to PUBLICLY COMFORT those who are sorrowing than through COLLECTIVE PRAYER?
 3. And what better way to PUBLICLY REJOICE with those who are rejoicing than through COLLECTIVE SINGING?
- C. Praying and singing are some of the deepest expressions of our heart.
1. There are few things that can enhance and enrich our fellowship together MORE than coming together to pray and sing.

- II. In a moment we're going to sing a song that we often call an "Invitation Song."
 - A. As I've said before, this is something we do as a matter of tradition.
 - 1. We have no idea whether First Century Christians closed their time of worship with a song – all we know is singing was a vital part of their worship together.
 - 2. When we sing this song, we'll be teaching one another, or speaking to one another in a psalm, hymn or spiritual song.
 - B. We'll be singing words that are specifically designed to encourage each of us to think seriously about our relationship with the Lord.
 - 1. So I want to ask you to do this:
 - a. If you have never given your life to the Lord – if you have never come to Christ in complete faithful obedience, repenting of your sins and being baptized into Christ for the remission of your past sins – then please listen to the message of this song.
 - (1). It's our prayer that the words we sing will touch your heart and motivate you to surrender your life to Jesus Christ this very day.

- b. And, if you're a child of God, but you've let the things of this world crowd out the love for the Lord you ONCE had, then I pray you will also listen to the words of this song.
 - (1). And again, it's our prayer that the words we sing will touch your heart and motivate you to recommit your life to the Lord.
- 2. So, I encourage you to do whatever you need to do at this moment as we stand and sing.