

“Community at Cedar Grove: Belonging to Each Other”

3. “Passionate, Persistent, Corporate Prayer!”

Acts 2:42, 46, and 4:24 – 31

Introduction:

This morning as we look at God’s Word, we are taking a third look at the internal health of our church family here at Cedar Grove: Our Community Life. The truth is that the Lord wired each one of us with the desire for **Relationships** with **Each Other**. It is also true that in a church of this size we are not going to get to know one another in meaningful ways if we only ever see each other for an hour and a half on Sunday morning in worship.

Church health experts tell us that there are three fundamental needs that every believer in Jesus Christ has within them: Worship, Fellowship, and Relationship. Churches that address those needs by creating ways for the members to relate to Jesus and others are healthy, vibrant and growing. Churches that do not create ways for those needs to be met are generally walking through a slow process of death of the church. They are usually diminishing in size and growing older in median age each year.

The equation goes like this: Celebration + Congregation + Cell = **Healthy Church** body. The words should be easy enough to fit into Cedar Grove Church family ears but we will state the obvious.

- Celebration is the worship gathering of the church that can number in the thousands and still be deeply meaningful and personal. Celebration is joyous and festive. It is praise and worship, prayer, giving, and hearing God’s Word through preaching. **At Cedar Grove this takes place at 8:00 and 10:30 on Sunday mornings.**
- Congregation is a grouping of more than 15 and can number up to 75 people, a place where you relate as a small church would relate. It is a place where God’s Word is taught, caring for one another, taking meals to the sick in your group, and you are missed when you aren’t there. **At Cedar Grove Congregation takes place in Sunday School Classes!**
- Cell is a gathering of less than 15 people that is much more intimate, where you can really get to know one another well. It generally takes place in a home and has components of relating, studying, praying, and fellowshiping. **At Cedar Grove Cell takes place in our Home Groups that are being formed.**

So we are seeking to find ways to actively communicate to every person that attends Cedar Grove Church that we believe choosing to **Relate** to other **Believers** is vital to our personal health as His follower and to our church as a whole. So we believe choosing to get involved in a Sunday School Class and a Home Group will put each of us in a place to engage in meaningful relationships with other Christians.

We are called to be sowing deep relational love with each other. God wired us with the need for relationships that are authentic and open. **The Bible tells us that we are to do some things that enable us to engage in deeply meaningful relationships.** There are **10 imperatives** regarding how we are asked to relate: Loving, forgiving, encouraging, praying for, caring about, and teaching one another, speaking the truth in love, counseling, admonishing, and urging one another to walk with Jesus intimately, are to be flowing spontaneously in our church family.

We are seeking to work with the Lord to create safe places in our church family where we may engage with each other and get beneath the surface of things, to encourage one another toward love and good deeds. We are seeking to create three things:

A **Place to Belong** – Belonging means everyone who calls Cedar Grove Church their church home is given the opportunity to enter into meaningful relationships that are based in the love of Jesus. Belonging means people who come here feel that they are known and they are missed if they aren't in attendance that week. It means a safe place with people who love me in which I may explore what it means to be the son of God in Christ Jesus. It means I have a place of unconditional acceptance in which I won't be judged or put down if I don't have all of the answers exactly right.

A **Place to Grow** – It is equally important to us as leaders in the church here that all of us have found a space for us to grow in our spiritual life with Jesus. So, for us the most important spiritual component of Sunday School and Home Groups is that the Word of God is opened up together, studied, and its meaning made clear. Opening up God's Word together is a part of what it means to be Brethren in Christ. We have been a community that longs to know and live out the Word of God since 1780! We long for each person to have the opportunity to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior.

A **Place to Love** – It is so important to us as leaders in the church at Cedar Grove that all of us are relating to others in love. The truth is that the demonstration of what it means to live a Christian life is love for others. Jesus made this exceedingly clear when He taught His disciples. John 13:34, 35 *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

I. Internal Health: Passionate Prayer Together:

Acts 2:42 *"They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."*

These five words "They devoted themselves to prayer" are two words in the Greek text. The first word is a past tense participle: proskarterountes, "they were persistently adhering to, they unremittingly were ones continuing in, they were constantly engaged in" proseuchais, "offering prayers, presenting their wishes and desires to God."

There is such a powerful result of their passionately praying together in Acts 4: Acts 4:23, 24 *"When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God..."*

Acts 4:31 *“And when they had prayed, the place where they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness.”*

The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth is not primarily an organization; it is primarily an organism! The local body of believers that is healthy, where people are being saved from sin, healed of their brokenness, filled with the Holy Spirit, and each person is walking in deep, personal fellowship with Jesus, is a church full of people who know how important it is to communicate with the Lord God in prayer!

The Church of Jesus Christ does not move forward by programs and administration. If the Church of Jesus moves forward and takes any ground in the lives of people in a community, she moves forward on her knees! Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus in Ephesians 6:10 – 18 we are engaged in a spiritual warfare for the souls of people in our geographic spheres of influence! If we are to move forward and gain ground in the hearts and lives and souls of people it will be by the power of God’s Holy Spirit flowing through us!

Ephesians 6:13 *“Therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground...”*

Ephesians 6:18 *“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert, and always keep on praying for all the saints.”*

Paul is emphasizing that we are a spiritual army which must take up spiritual armor and weapons if we are to be victorious warriors in the Lamb’s War for Juniata County. Prayer is not optional! It is essential! The great heroes of the faith consistently told us and modeled for us that passionate, persistent prayer with other believers is the first option for us to consider when we are walking in anything difficult.

I am personally grateful to the Lord my God for teaching me powerful lessons about prayer and intercession, over the past 47 years, and I’ll share them with you this morning:

First, always begin and end my prayers with honoring and glorifying the Lord my God!

Second, I have two intercessors that join me when I pray in the presence of the Father at the Throne of Grace: The Lord Jesus is at the Father’s right hand interceding for me and the Holy Spirit intercedes for me with groans and cries I don’t always see or hear!

Third, I cannot fully grasp all that needs to be said and done in prayer so I need others to pray with me!

Fourth, God does a whole lot more to change me when I intercede, than I do to change His mind on anything! In fact, God the Spirit often is preparing me to be an answer to prayer, if I am listening to His whispers and nudges in my heart!

II. They Prayed in Faith:

Acts 2:42 *"They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer."*

These believers had been with Jesus Christ for years. They saw Him crucified and dead, and they saw Him raised from the dead. They saw Him ascend to Heaven, and they had just been filled with His Holy Spirit just as He had promised them they would experience! Therefore, they prayed in steadfast faith; they did not waver in unbelief!

James 1:6, 7 *"but when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he shall receive anything from the Lord."*

Hebrews 11:1 and 6 *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. "And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him."*

There is a popular health, wealth, and prosperity teaching that says, "If you have enough faith you can obtain anything you want from the Lord because Jesus died to make you happy!" The truth is that is heretical. Faith has no power at all to do anything apart from the object it is focused on! There is no such thing as "enough faith." There is great faith and small faith, but there's not a word in the Bible about enough faith!

Faith either is or it isn't existing in a human heart! Jesus said, *"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed you can say to this mountain be removed and thrown into the sea and it will obey you!"* Matthew 17:20. Why would Jesus say such a thing about such little faith? Because the power rests not in the faith or in my prayer of faith! I have no faith in my ability to believe God but I have every faith in the One: *"who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all I can ask or even imagine."* Ephesians 3:20

The great missionary statesman to China, Hudson Taylor said, "Faith requires no extra signs in order to believe because it is not how great my faith is but how great my God is!"

Oswald Sanders in his book "Prayer Power Unlimited" recounts a great story of faith:

"A man from New Zealand had a boy who in spite of a godly upbringing utterly rejected the Gospel. But the man prayed and laid hold of the peace of God that the boy would be saved. He got news of his tragic death but the dad refused to doubt his son's salvation. One day a friend of his son came to see him and said, "Do you know you will see your son in Heaven?" The father said, "Yes, I prayed until I had that assurance." The boy said, "Two weeks before the accident we were at revival services and we both received Jesus as our Savior." To which the godly prayerful dad replied, "I am delighted to hear what you say. But I am no more sure now that I will see him in Heaven than I was before you told me."

He is saying true faith believes it has the answer when it prays and it needs no signs to prop it up! **These believers in Acts 2:42 – 47 and Acts 4:24 – 31 prayed in faith believing God to do what they asked Him to do!**

III. They Prayed Together in Earnest:

Hebrews 11:6 *“And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”*

These believers gathered together in earnest prayer in the upper room had seen the way Jesus prayed when He was on earth with them. They knew when Jesus prayed He meant business with His Father God as they observed His prayer life. As we read through these two passages on the prayer of those first century Christians in Jerusalem, it appears to us they got the message about what true prayer looks like when a group of people engage in it!

When the believers got together to hear what the Sanhedrin had threatened Peter and John with, their first response was to come together and engage in heartfelt and earnest prayer. Acts 4:23, 24 *“When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God...”*

The great prayer meeting of Acts 4:24 – 31 is Spirit-filled believers coming together in one accord, **“one in Heart and Soul,”** is the word Luke used here to describe the way they passionately and earnestly prayed. And it was their cumulative faith in earnest prayer that moved Heaven and sent the Holy Spirit out of their gathering to others! The power of God fell on people and more of them were redeemed!

Great Revival Historian **J. Edwin Orr** once wrote the following observation: **“No great spiritual awakening has begun anywhere in the world apart from united prayer – Christians persistently and passionately praying for revival sends revival into their community!”**

The Bible says loving communities are characterized by praying earnestly for each other, rejoicing with those who are joyful and weeping with those whose hearts are broken. There is no way we can do any of those things unless we get to know each other, hear each other’s hearts, joys, and sorrows. We can’t do that in 10 minutes in the church lobby on Sunday morning!

These early Christians were described as earth shakers. And I believe we all must see truth behind their earth shaking lives. **It was their corporate prayer life, their passionate gatherings in prayer and intercession that sent them into the world freshly filled with the Holy Spirit and ablaze with the love of Heaven as Witnesses to Jesus and His Gospel!!**

When a number of Spirit-led believers in Jesus come together in His Name and cry out to Him in prayers of agreement in earnest, the uniform teaching of Scripture is that their hearts crying out to God in intercession moves the heart of God to break in to their gatherings in powerful ways. This is a model prayer of what the Lord our God delights to see in His gathered people. They came together in deep, heartfelt, and earnest intercession and God moved among them in power!

Jesus said in Matthew 18:19, 20 “Again I tell you [all] that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask for, it will be done for you [all] by my Father in Heaven. For where two or three come together in my Name there am I with them.”

And again in John 14:13, 14 “I will do whatever you [all] ask in my name. ...You [all] may ask for anything in my name and I will do it.”

IV. They Prayed in Jesus’ Name:

It is of intense interest to me as one who loves Scripture, to see how much these believers engaged in ministry and in intercessory prayer in the Name of Jesus Christ their Lord, as we read the Book of Acts!

Acts 2:38 “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.”

Acts 4:10 “Then know this, you and everyone in Israel; it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.”

And in their corporate prayer for boldness, they prayed in Acts 4:27 “the people of this city conspired against your servant Jesus, whom you appointed.” Acts 4:30 “Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the Name of your holy Servant Jesus.”

Many of these people had been in the upper room with Jesus when He gave them a series of powerful promises about praying in His Name: John 14:13, 14 “I will do whatever you [all] ask in my name. ...You [all] may ask for anything in my name and I will do it.” John 16:24 “Until now you have not asked anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.”

The Name of Jesus does not have magical or mystical power associated with it, so that God is obligated to give us whatever we ask in the Name of His Son Jesus. **Matthew 7:21 – 23 Jesus says some very interesting things about using the Name of Jesus without life-related authority! But to sincerely pray in the Name of Jesus means two important things:**

First, I am walking in an intimate Relationship with Jesus, I am washed in His precious blood and He has come to live in me by His Spirit. **Second, that I have Aligned my Will with His good, pleasing, and perfect will for my life.** Jesus is not bound to answer self-centered prayers I pray just because I say in the Name of Jesus. The real issue is; have I forsaken sinful self-interest and have I pursued His holy, cleansing presence in my life? When I meet these two criteria He says He will answer my earnest prayers I pray with my brothers and sisters!

In Acts 4 it is clear that God answered their passionate and earnest prayers in Jesus Name. I close with four reasons why God answered their earnest, corporate prayers:

1. They prayed confidently in God’s ability not out of a sense of hopelessness or despair

2. They prayed unselfishly aligned with His will for their lives
3. Their interpersonal relationships with right with each other. Remember Peter reminds husbands to treat their wives well, “*That nothing may hinder your prayers.*”
4. They prayed with deep loving and forgiving hearts for each other

Mark 11:24, 25 “*Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believing that you have received it will be yours. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in Heaven may forgive your trespasses.*”

January 9, 2022

COMMUNITY: BELONGING TO EACH OTHER:

3. “Passionate, Persistent, Corporate Prayer!”
Acts 2:42, 46 and 4:23 – 31

Introduction:

We studying the internal health in our church: Our community life. We’re wired with desire for meaningful **R**_____ with each other.

Church health experts have written an equation that is universally true: Celebration + Congregation + Cell = **H**_____ **C**_____.

Celebration is joyous and festive worship that can number in the thousands
 Congregation is between 15 and 75 people, like a small country church
 Cell is less than 15 people; a safe place where relationships can grow deep

We believe choosing to **R**_____ to others in **L**_____ is vital to our personal spiritual health and our church family health.

The Bible calls us to do ten imperatives that will enable us to engage in **D**_____ and **M**_____ relationships ...

A place to **B**_____

A place to **G**_____

A place to **L**_____ John 13:34, 35

I. Internal Health: Passionate Prayer Together: Acts 2:42

The five words “They devoted themselves to prayer,” are actually only two words in the Greek text.... There is such a **P**_____ **R**_____ of their prayer in Acts 2:23, 24, and 31.

The Church of Jesus Christ on the earth is not primarily an organization – it is an **O**_____ and it does not go forward by programs and administration! It moves forward on its knees!

In Ephesians 6:10-18 Paul teaches the believers we are engaged in a **S**_____
W_____ for the souls of people in our spheres of influence! Ephesians 6:13 and 18

The Lord has been teaching me four key lessons on intercession in my 47 years of walking with Him: 1. Begin and end with worship, 2. I have two intercessors, 3. I need others to agree with me, 4. The Lord changes me when I pray!

II. They Prayed Together in Faith: Acts 2:42

They had been with Jesus for years. They were freshly filled with the Spirit. Therefore, they prayed in **S**_____ **F**_____. James 1:6, 7 and Hebrews 11:1 and 6

The health and wealth teachers use the term: “enough faith.” Faith either is or isn’t. And a small amount of faith can move mountains! Matthew 17:20

I have no faith in my ability to believe God but I have great faith in the One who is ...
Ephesians 3:20.

Quotes by Hudson Taylor, J. Oswald Sanders “Prayer Power Unlimited”

III. They Prayed Together in Earnest: Hebrews 11:6

These believers had seen Jesus’ prayer life – that when He prayed, He meant business with the Father! After Peter and John were threatened they prayed in **H**_____,
E_____ intercession, Acts 2:23, 24 and Luke says they prayed in “one heart and soul” homothumadon “one single passionate desire”

Quote by great revival historian J. Edwin Orr

These men and women were earth shakers, because they had a corporate prayer life together that was alive and passionate for God! Therefore, the Holy Spirit empowered them to
W_____ to His **G**_____! Matthew 18:19, 20 and John 14:13, 14

IV. They Prayed Together in Jesus’ Name:

These believers engaged in ministry and intercessory prayer in Jesus’ Name!
Acts 2:38, 4:10, 4:27 and John 14:13, 14

The Name of Jesus is not mystical or magical: see Matthew 7:21 – 23 ... But to pray in His Name means two very important things: I am walking in a **R**_____ with Him and I have **A**_____ my **W**_____ with His good, pleasing, and perfect will for my life!

Four reasons why the Lord God answered their passionate and earnest prayers in Acts 4:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Concluding Thoughts:

Discussion Starter Questions for Home Groups

1. Why do you think that a healthy church is creating three different levels of ministry for the attendees' involvement?
2. What were your thoughts as you heard the three levels of our group life at Cedar Grove: Celebration, Congregation, and Cell?
3. Why is it important to have a place in our lives to belong, to grow, and to love others?
4. Why is it so important for us to gather together and pray in earnest, in passionate cry of our hearts in intercession for others?
5. Why is it so important for us to pray together in faith the Lord will hear and answer our passionate heart-cries?
6. Why do you think the Lord desires for our corporate prayer lives to be prayed in earnest with one another?
7. Why are we called to pray together in the Name of Jesus? What does it mean when we say we're praying together in His Name?
8. Read together aloud the story in Acts 2:41 - 47 and discuss the different ways the first century church related to each other.
9. Read together aloud Romans 12:9 – 21 and discuss insights that you have about what it means to be His body in this world.

10. Are there people in your sphere of influence who are resisting the Holy Spirit, or who have turned away from following Jesus altogether? Are you asking others to join you in passionate heart-cries in prayer for the people you passionately love?