

# Praying Together

by **Bev Marshall-Goodell**

Grace United Methodist Church  
300 W. Marengo Road  
Tiffin, IA 52340  
319-545-2281  
graceumc@southslope.net  
www.tiffingraceumc.org

© 2010 Bev Marshall-Goodell

**Praying Together**  
by Bev Marshall-Goodell  
Tiffin Grace United Methodist Church

*Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'*

*--Matthew 18:18-20*

This Scripture provides the most compelling reason for praying with others. There is great power and authority in praying together. When we pray together, it's effective. It can change things. God has promised to be present with us wherever two or three come together in God's name. In praying together we experience power and the presence of God. Jesus promised this and then the disciples experienced both this power and this sense of presence as they had times of prayer together.

Not only will praying with others prove helpful to you, it is also the basis for many a spiritual awakening. For example, the Evangelical Revival in England in the late 18th century began in a little 'Holy Club' at Oxford. So impressed were the Wesleys with the prayer cell principle that every Methodist society was organized into small Band and Class meetings. Similarly the great revival in America in 1857-1858 was empowered and nurtured in prayer meetings. The longest-lasting revival in Christian history, affecting five generations of Koreans, has been noted for its powerful prayer meetings.

Americans tend to think of prayer as a solitary thing. You go off into your study or maybe to a retreat center to pray. Private prayer really is important to our relationship with Christ. Yet before it is anything else, prayer is something done with others. The Body of Christ, the church, is a fellowship that prays. Praying together was one of the hallmarks of the church from its start. In Acts, they gathered to pray in the days after Christ's death. The Holy Spirit was first poured out on a group at prayer. The early believers wanted to align their steps with God's path, whatever lay ahead.

Stephen Winward, in his book **Teach Yourself to Pray**, says, "There is a deep joy in praying together, an added vitality, a plus difficult to define. It is rather like the difference between eating your meal alone and sharing in a party feast. Eating together is not the same as eating in solitude; the something more is the company, the fellowship. So it is with prayer."

When we pray together in worship, *someone else* is saying, "Let us pray...". You're not doing your own thing, but you're choosing to join others. By participating in such public prayers, you are encouraged to pray:

- when you don't feel like praying;
- when you don't want to pray;
- when you would really rather do something else;
- when you have concentrating on praying;
- when you aren't ready to do it;

- for and with those you are in conflict with;
- about people and matters you wouldn't have otherwise thought to pray for or would have forgotten to pray for.

You can learn the basic disciplines of prayer by praying in worship services. You learn that others are praying with you about the concerns they shared. You discover that there is great spiritual power when Christ's followers pray together with unity of purpose. From praying together, you can learn that prayer was something far grander than the prayers of any one person. In prayer on their own, you learned that prayer can be as small as two -- you and God -- and that prayer fails to be truly your prayer when you aren't intimately involved. The lessons of community prayer feed back into private prayer, and the lessons of private prayer feed back into the community.

### **The Advantages of Praying Together**

1. More prayers are lifted up to God. Praying together encourages all of us to pray more often about more things.
2. More people are engaged in prayer. Each of us has a unique way of praying, and praying together brings new perspectives to the issues.
3. People learn about one another. We come to know the hopes, dreams and concerns of those with whom we pray.
4. A sense of belonging within a community is developed. Praying as part of group connects us one to another with a common, greater purpose.
5. Moods are elevated through caring for others and feeling their love and care. We hear of and rejoice in more answered prayers.
6. Hearts are opened to the needs of others. We are reminded that we can be the answer to someone else's prayers.
7. A "body of Christ" team spirit is developed and advanced. We are more unified in our thinking and being.
8. Lives are transformed. Those who pray and those for whom prayers are lifted up can be noticeably transformed.

### **How should we pray together?**

The best size for the group will depend on what the group does. If the emphasis is on personal therapy, the group ought to be small - say 3 to 6. If the group focuses on Bible discussion the optimum size is 8 to 12. If it's a 'house church' there may be 30 to 40, but there ought to be times where 'twos or threes' pray together.

Sensitivity ought to be shown towards those who have rarely, if ever, prayed aloud before. Ease them into group prayer by encouraging written prayers to be read, sentence prayers to be spoken, or a few 'prayer points' shared. With acceptance and love and encouragement, everyone can learn to pray aloud. The lengthy prayers of the verbose might have to be "reined in" in the process!

There are many ways to pray together. Charlie Shedd says, "Pray in your own way. There are twelve gates into the holy city and a thousand different doors to prayer. When we pray we are entering a vast expanse of truth which leaves room for much experiment and many approaches."

Being silent as a group is important. After scripture is read, it is good to encourage silent meditation on the sacred words for a few minutes. Michael Wright says, “For people who live hectic lives, corporate meditation can be an oasis in a desert.”

Prayers of all types should be encouraged. Sometimes the group can devote time to adoration and praise. Confession can happen in a group by silently writing down our sins, tearing the paper into small pieces, passing a cup around, then offering assurance of pardon (saying something like “As you have confessed your sins to God, in the name of Jesus you are forgiven”). Prayers of thanksgiving are also important. Bidding prayers can invite members to verbalize their blessings. For example: “Let us recall ‘high moments’ from the recent past” or “let us thank God for someone, a book we have read, or a scripture that has been meaningful to us.”

Specific intercessory prayers for others ought to be written down as they are prayed. This practice will allow the group to check later for God’s answer. Sometimes it is enough to mention a name, and no more details (to avoid gossip). Trust and confidentiality are important here. The group prayer could conclude with someone bringing a special benediction; or by the group praying a selected prayer of dedication.

Groups might also share a responsive litany, or pray the words of great hymn or Psalm of adoration together. Bidding prayers can be offered by group members. For example, “Let us pray for our pastor and leaders.” Pluriform praying – all praying aloud at the same time – has practiced in many cultures, and over many centuries. It’s beautiful once we overcome our initial embarrassment! When someone has a special need, the “laying on of hands” is an ancient practice that may be employed to deepen a connection to the need.

You can use different strategies to focus your prayers. For example, take a **prayer walk** and pray for your neighbors and area schools and businesses. Make a “Ten Most Wanted” poster with the names and pictures of neighbors, relatives or even famous people who need Jesus in their life. Or use a world map to draw attention to places and peoples you know or hear about from missionaries or on the news where God’s intercession would be helpful.

### **Your personal plan for praying together.**

Take a few moments to develop a plan you will utilize for the next thirty days to increase your participation in praying together.

- \_\_\_ 1. Lift up your personal joys and concerns to the congregation during regular worship.
- \_\_\_ 2. Identify a prayer partner who will meet with you regularly (daily, weekdays, weekly) to share a time of prayer.
- \_\_\_ 3. Encourage a small group of which you are already a member to establish or expand a practice of praying together.
- \_\_\_ 4. Join or start a prayer group that will covenant to meet regularly for prayer together.
- \_\_\_ 5. Choose or adopt a new approach to focus your praying together (e.g. walking prayer, a world map, or a prayer pattern such as ACTS = adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication).

After thirty days, assess what progress you have made as a result of your praying together.



Part of the Passport to Discipleship Program  
at Grace United Methodist Church  
Tiffin, Iowa