

Letters to the Church



FEBRUARY '23

DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

I'm teaching my daughters how to pray. One of my highest privileges and most rewarding moments each day is to tuck them in at night and say prayers with them. It's a special time of sleepy eyes, snuggles with teddy bears, and a father's heart beaming with joy over his children. As a dad, hearing their prayers informs me so much about how to nurture my children. You can learn to appreciate so much about a brother or sister by joining with them in prayer. Shared prayers are always intimate. If I hear the way you speak to God, I've got a great picture of your heart.



I'm training them to add depth to their prayers: to pray beyond personal requests for fun and sunshine tomorrow (though there's nothing wrong with that), to pray deeper with praises and thanks, and to pray beyond themselves - for our family, for our loved ones, for our sick, for the unsaved, for our church, and for the whole Church around the world. The more we appreciate the character of the God Who hears our prayers, the more depth with which we speak to Him. There's a difference in the way we should approach individual prayers (just you and God) and assembled prayers (two, three, or more gathered). There is a proper time and need to personally pour out your heart before him (**Psalm 62:8**) and there is a place for praying representatively on behalf of "us."

The apostles asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (**Luke 11:1**). Our Lord instructed them by praying corporately (as an assembly) when he said "Our Father." He prayed as a representative of the group to the Father of them all. Consider the depth of his prayer and especially his inclusion of them in his requests. He said, "Give us this day our daily bread." He said, "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors," even though he personally had no debts or debtors! He was training them to pray not just for their own needs, but on everyone's behalf saying, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (**Matthew 6:9 - 13**) He trained them to pray not as individuals, but as a people.



Praying this way is a great posture for our weekly assemblies together on Sunday mornings. We are gathering as a people in our Lord's name with a desire with one heart, one mind, and one voice to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **(Romans 15:6)** Regular practice of corporate prayer teaches us to become what we are—united in Christ. Assembled prayer in the church trains the church to agree, to be without division, and to be of the same mind and judgment **(1st Corinthians 1:10)**. It's one way we as a congregation stand "firm in one spirit" and "with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" **(Philippians 1:27)**. It's a time to redeem with requests for our fellowship, our growth, our witness, and our glory to God alone.

The Bible is filled with examples of a man or woman standing up and speaking to God on behalf of the whole congregation. See Jehoshaphat's representative prayer for deliverance in 2nd Chronicles 20, see Ezra's corporate prayer for repentance in Ezra 9, see Esther's call to all the people to pray in Esther 4, Daniel's prayer for their return from exile in Daniel 9, see the many mouths lift one voice in prayer for boldness in Acts 4, and see Jesus pray for all of us in John 17. We're following in proven footsteps every time we pray corporately. As we lift up one voice on behalf of many hearts, praying as "us" and "we," it is a shadow and a type of the gospel itself—one person standing in for the many, making intercession for them **(Hebrews 7:25)**.

So PA Bible, each night the girls and I are learning to remember and represent you all in our prayers, please do the same for us.

YOUR PASTOR & SERVANT,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'John'.