

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Penrith

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ENCOURAGEMENT LETTER – 19FEB25

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How are you today? I am thankful for our church and God's work in our midst and the unity we enjoy in the gospel of Christ.

Today, as part of our series considering the Congregation Snapshot, we are talking about prayer, before moving on to church matters.

ENCOURAGEMENT: A Surprise in the Snapshot – Prayer

We are considering our Congregation Snapshot over the next number of weeks looking at what we value, what we are doing well and what we need to work on. Today we talk about Bible Study.

Those who participated in talking through the Congregation Snapshot a few weeks ago were surprised at how little attention prayer received, barely rating in the Church Life section in any category, only coming to the fore as something we are doing well in the Worship Service questions, and that only by the 9am service. I thought it rated a mention as a practice we would all say is important, yet received little attention in the Congregation Snapshot.

How do we see prayer in the life of our church? How does that compare with what we see in the Bible? Prayer happens across much of our activities – Worship Services, Bible Studies, praying before ministries that serve others. There is also a prayer meeting once a week, on a Wednesday morning at 9am at the manse. There are other times where we pray, such as when someone tells of their struggles and we take moment to pray for them, or on a pastoral visit.

So what do we see in the Bible regarding prayer? Prayer features large in the Bible as an important part of the life of God's people. There is a whole book of the Bible, Psalms, that comprises of prayers for God's people to use both individually and together in the temple. The temple itself has set times for prayer. One of these times that stands out to me is the lighting of the incense

in the Holy Place which happened twice a day. One priest would be selected to go in and go through the process of lighting the incense on the incense altar. At this time, worshipers in the courtyard would spend time in silent prayer together for about half-an-hour until the priest emerges from the Holy Place. It is during this time of prayer that Gabriel appears to Zechariah (Luke 1:9-11). We see this moment in Revelation 8:1-5 too that shows the impact of prayers upon the earth. The incense lighting became so synonymous with prayer that the Psalmist writes,

*May my prayer be set before you like incense;
may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.*

Psalm 141:2

In the New Testament, prayer is an integral part of the community. Throughout the Acts of the Apostles, we see the church meeting together to pray. It was the practice of the Apostles and disciples after the resurrection and before Pentecost (Acts 1:14), after Pentecost, the church devoted themselves to prayer (2:42), they prayed in response to persecution (4:22-31), it is while they worship and pray that Barnabus and Saul (Paul) are set apart for gospel work (13:2-3). We can find more examples throughout Scripture, that the church would meet together for the purpose of prayer.

When we look at how prayer features in our church, it is often as part of another ministry and the only time we meet for the primary purpose of praying is the prayer meeting on a Wednesday morning but this is only a few people. It is perhaps one thing we might think about as a church, how we gather together for the purpose of prayer. Is there an opportunity that you can take to meet and pray with others? Maybe join the prayer meeting? Maybe your Bible Study could spend one of your meetings praying together? Is there another time we can run a prayer meeting? Are there other ways to strengthen prayer in our church?

FINAL COMMENTS

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Romans 12:12

As always, love and prayers, Steve.