

HOUSE TO HOUSE PRAYER

Peter Hay, prepared for word ministry, 4 October 2020

Transcription of recording, slightly edited

Prayer is a fellowship by faith with God

Today, our session is on house to house, or corporate prayer, and this is the final session on these four foundations of fellowship.

I am sure you are recognising that we have really just touched on these foundations in something of a firstfruits manner, and there is a lot more that we can and will develop over the coming months in relation to them.

I want to begin by reminding us of a key point that we have been making across the last couple of sessions as we have been talking about prayer; that prayer is a conversation in which we speak by faith in the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The ground, or context, of this fellowship is 'holy ground', and Paul described holy ground as 'the grace in which we stand'.

We receive our access into grace by the faith that we receive by hearing the word.

Whether we are praying individually, as households, or house to house, prayer is a *fellowship*. We are not praying into nothing, are we?

Individually, we are praying to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And when we gather for prayer in our households, there is obviously a context of relationship and fellowship. That is the same when we pray corporately, so the principle of prayer being a fellowship is obvious.

However, that means that if we disconnect ourselves from fellowship with the presbytery and with others in the body of Christ, our prayers will be hindered.

This is why Jesus identified receiving the daily bread - repentance and forgiveness - as one of the four spices of incense that is prayer.

Praying in relation to suffering

Recognising the connection between prayer and fellowship is fundamental to *how* we pray when we are suffering.

Prayer for people who are sick and prayer in relation to our own suffering is quite a common

aspect or focus of our prayer individually, in our families, and then when we come together to pray *with* one another and *for* one another.

Therefore, it is important that we understand how to pray *in relation to suffering*. Let's consider the instructions of the apostle James, who addressed this subject quite directly.

'Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray [So, it's straightforward, isn't it?]. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

'And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed.' Jas 5:13-16.

The first point to note is the obvious one - if we are suffering, we are to *pray*.

But this is not to be carnal prayer. There is a distinction between prayer as a spiritual activity, and carnal prayer.

This means that when we are praying in relation to our suffering, we are not to be praying in a way that is motivated by fear as we seek to escape from our difficulties.

Suffering of itself has no inherent merit

We are very aware of that, but it is also important to note that carnal prayer can be merely positive thinking or positive articulation, where we try to convince ourselves that this suffering is good for us; and we are, somehow, thanking the Lord for something that is actually quite painful.

It is important that we cease from this positive thinking in relation to our suffering, as it is not *spiritual* prayer. We *do* need to pray in relation to our sufferings, but merely being 'positive' about them is not how we are to pray.

It's important that we cease from a prevalent and unhelpful misconception - that the Son of God vicariously suffered for everyone; so, He has done all the suffering and now is giving to us 'a package of suffering for our good'.

That is not what we are saying about our participation in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

It's not that He has done it completely on our behalf and, somehow, suffering is inherently good; and, in His love, He is now giving to us suffering, which He has already taken away, because it will do some good in us.

Suffering has *no* inherent merit.

It really is the outcome of the fall of mankind. It is the harbinger of death because of the righteous judgement of God upon us. This means that it is the foretaste of our death because of sin, under the judgement of God.

All suffering is that; all of it.

We cannot continue to patronise God by thanking Him for our suffering as though this is the expression of His love for us; as though He has suffered everything and, then, in love, He is giving us some suffering because it is doing us inherent good.

That is *not* what we are saying about the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

He turns our suffering into chastening

So, what are we saying?

God's love is revealed by the offering of the Son.

Through His offering, our suffering because of judgement was turned to chastening. He *joined us* in our death and separation, and His body became the body of sin. In this way, He received the full judgement, the suffering of death, for every man.

However, He didn't take it *away* from us; He is suffering it *with us*.

As He is doing that by the grace of God, He is turning that suffering, because of judgement, to chastening, by which the other law of humanity is being removed from His body.

And He is being *made alive* out from the death of our sin as the Son of God, the Firstfruits.

Christ died our death, making it His death.

We are suffering under judgement because we have another law within us and, when we live by that other law, we are deviating from what God had predestined for us as His sons. Because of that, we are judged.

If we are *in Him*, our judgement is turned to chastisement. We are being delivered from living according to the other law and the principle of sin, and we are growing to maturity as a son of God in Christ.

This is the *fellowship* of Christ's sufferings.

And we do not rejoice in our *sufferings per se*. We rejoice that we are *counted worthy* to suffer *with Him*.

He has already finished our sufferings, and we are no longer suffering them as a point of condemnation and judgement. We are now suffering them as a point of chastisement by which we attain an eternal inheritance.

That is what it means to suffer; and this needs to shape our orientation as we *pray in relation to our sufferings*.

Prayer during suffering begins by being quiet before God

In the natural, the first thing that we tend to do when we are suffering is to panic. Emotions are involved, and we seek to escape from the pain that we are experiencing because of our suffering.

Many people pray to God in this way, under pressure. They cry out to the Lord for deliverance, because they are afraid of dying. We know that is carnal prayer.

So, what is the beginning point? We know that we have to pray in the Spirit but, actually, the beginning point is that *we need to be quiet*.

We need to cease from the expression, or articulation, of our *fear*.

And we are responsible for quietening our own spirit, so that we can pray in the Holy Spirit.

We must *begin* by quietening our own spirit. And there are some beautiful passages in the Bible about the responsibility and the capacity that we have, as an identity, to speak to ourselves and to quieten ourselves.

This is part of taking 'every thought captive to the obedience of Christ'.

'Why are you cast down, O my soul [That's amazing isn't it? This psalm was not being spoken to the Lord. The person was speaking to their *own* soul.]? And why are you disquieted within me?' Psa 42:11.

This is the agitation, the anxiety, the turmoil and the frustration of life that is inside us.

Hope in God is to stand in grace

‘And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God.’

Now, what does it mean to ‘hope in God’?

Does it mean that we ‘hold on’ and ‘hope’ that God ‘comes through’ for us?

Surely, by now, we should be clear that hoping in God is *standing in the grace*. Having received our introduction by faith into the grace in which we stand, we hope, or we glory, in the hope of becoming the sons of God. Rom 5:2.

So, to hope in God is to stand in grace. The point is that we have to do that by *hearing the word* that grants us faith and access into this grace.

Hoping in God is not just hoping that He ‘comes through’; hoping in God is standing up by faith in that grace.

The grace is actually the context of our joining, or fellowship, with Christ Himself.

‘Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.’ Psa 42:11.

‘The help of my countenance’ is a beautiful statement. Your ‘countenance’ is the capacity to *express life*; it is the expression, or communication, of your face.

So, what is coming from your face? Is it merely the expression of your own ‘good’ or the drive to alleviate your circumstances?

It *will* be, unless you are helped by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the Helper, and He is helping us by being the expression of, or the capacity to reveal, our name as a son of God. If we are standing in the hope, which is standing in the grace, then we are standing as a son of God. And the Holy Spirit is ‘the help of our countenance’.

He is the One who is enabling our expression as a son of God in every circumstance of life. What does it begin with? It begins with quietening our spirit.

Waiting silently for God

‘My soul waits silently for God alone.’ Psa 62:5.

The psalmist was talking to his soul again and saying, ‘Soul, you’re all agitated and worried. Wait silently.’

This is ‘be still and know’. This is the foundation that is poor in spirit.

‘My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is not from myself.’ That is what it means! ‘For my expectation is from *Him*.’

Is your expectation of life from Him or is your expectation for life that is sourced in yourself?

Unless you are delivered progressively from the other law, it will inevitably be sourced from yourself.

‘My soul waits silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him.’ We can all have this confession.

‘He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defence; I shall not be moved.’ Psa 62:6.

This is a beautiful point, isn’t it? This is the confession of where our *protection* is - and it is by standing in grace.

Our motive for prayer is cleansed by His blood

As we pray in the Holy Spirit, He *joins* us to Christ, and to Christ’s prayer. Christ is praying, ‘Not My will, but Yours, be done.’ That is the prayer that *we cannot* pray because of the other law within us.

However, as we are *joined to Christ*, and His blood is being sprinkled on our conscience, our motive for prayer is changing.

This is the throne of grace where we obtain mercy and find grace to *priest* ourselves, which means to ‘present ourselves as a living sacrifice’ in the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings.

As we pray with Christ, our motives are being cleansed by His blood. This is the conscience being sprinkled and cleansed by His blood.

Our prayer is not driven by fear and anxiety; or by the torment or turmoil within us; or by the expectations that we have of ourselves and of our life.

Prayer compelled by love through the Holy Spirit – praying with understanding

Rather, it is *compelled by the love of God* that is being poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit, who is the Helper of our countenance.

Now, the Holy Spirit is pouring *love* into our heart.

What is love? *Love is the culture of offering.*

To receive this culture is to receive *understanding.*

Understanding is the culture of offering.

This means that we are to *cry out* for understanding so that we can *pray* with understanding.

To 'pray with understanding' means that we are praying by being joined to prayer that is an offering.

It is not prayer that is motivated by panic or loss of life. It is prayer that is motivated by the desire to lay down our life.

As we pray with understanding, we are able to make our requests known to God because we are part of the same spirit of faith, or conversation of faith, as Yahweh Himself.

We do not ask amiss in relation to our own pleasures, desires or expectations. We ask, or are engaged in the conversation, because we are *committed to Their covenant.* We are part of it.

Therefore, as we pray with understanding, we are able to make our requests known to God, asking *according to His will.* We can hear what the Spirit is saying to us in the midst of our sufferings.

Praying as we participate in His sufferings

We do not seek to escape our sufferings; we want to know *how* we are to walk with the Lord *in* them.

This clarity will often come by the word that is ministered at the communion through body ministry. So, we note the importance of the weekly prayer meetings and their connection to the ministry of the body of Christ at the communion table.

This is where the word is being proclaimed, granting us faith for our daily participation in His offering and sufferings, which is our journey with Christ each day.

If we pray as those who are suffering and praying in the Spirit, we are *standing in grace*; and we accept that Christ made our sufferings to be *His.*

He has experienced everything that we will experience. He has not taken them away from us; He has experienced them as well.

He gives to us a participation in His sufferings because, as He suffered by the grace of God, He turned those sufferings of judgement into chastisement, by which there has been a putting away of, or a deliverance from, sin and the other law.

And He is standing up as the New Creation.

Prayer – our connection to circumcision and deliverance to new life

In Him, as we accept our participation in those sufferings, which are our sufferings that He has made His, we too are being delivered from this corrupt influence in us.

This is the other law being circumcised, or cut, from our heart, and we are standing up in new life as part of new creation.

Prayer is part of our ongoing *connection* to this process. That is why we continue to pray when we are suffering. We are not to draw back, seeking whatever mechanism we can in order to be delivered from suffering.

We are asking the Lord *how to endure with Him* in the context of our sufferings, so that we are fulfilling the will of the Father in Christ - and that *may* mean deliverance from our impediment.

We are asking to remain connected to the finished work of Christ's offering, filling up that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, as a ministry for others.

Able to rejoice in our sufferings by the grace of God

So, we accept that Christ made our sufferings to be His, and He gives us a participation in His sufferings so that we can overcome sin and death, and be made alive with Him.

This is an important point. It is only by the grace of God that we are able to *rejoice* in our sufferings.

On one hand, we have to stop thanking the Lord for taking away our sufferings and giving us a portion, because that is not true.

However, as we are joined to the fellowship of Christ, and we are journeying with Him by grace, we are able to rejoice in our tribulations.

That is exactly what Paul said. He said that, having received access by faith into the grace in which we stand, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

‘And not only that [not only that *reality of prayer*], but we also glory [‘glory’ there literally means ‘rejoice’] in tribulations.’

Why do we rejoice? It is because we know that tribulation produces within us perseverance. Rom 5:3.

It is not just the perseverance of our natural character to ‘get through’. It is the perseverance of *Christ Himself*. In that tribulation, the quality, or character, of Christ’s own life is becoming ours. It is producing His character in us. Rom 5:4.

Suffering according to the will of God

‘Tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character [the character of the Son of God], and character produces hope.’

So, it is producing this hope in us. ‘Now hope does not disappoint [which means we are progressively attaining to our hope], because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.’ Rom 5:5.

This is amazing, isn’t it? This is the prayer and practice of those who are suffering according to the will of God.

That term, ‘suffering according to the will of God’ comes from 1 Peter Chapter 4.

‘Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.’ 1Pe 4:19.

If you commit your soul to Christ, it means that you are *joined* to Him. For what purpose? ‘Doing good’ is you fulfilling the will of God in Christ Jesus.

You are committing your soul in doing good through prayer.

Those who are suffering, *pray*.

‘Therefore let those who suffer *according to the will of God*.’

That’s the key. We need to be joined to the will of God. This is not just suffering because of our rebelliousness. This is suffering because of our rebelliousness that has been turned to chastisement in Christ. We are ceasing from our

rebellion and are walking in our obedience as a son of God. This is according to the will of God.

Let those who suffer ‘commit their souls to Him in doing good as to a faithful Creator’. 1Pe 4:19.

This is how we fulfil the works of sonship in Christ; or, another way of saying this is, how our hope is not disappointed.

Knowing the peace of God in the midst of suffering

So, the obvious question is, ‘How do you know whether you are suffering according to the will of God?’

A person who is suffering according to the will of God *knows the life and peace of God* in the midst of their circumstances.

They are not ‘putting it on’; pretending. Some people know that they are supposed to know life and peace in the midst of their suffering, so they try to talk positively as though they are convincing themselves that they are happy - but it is an absolute delusion. It is a lie.

For goodness sake, if you are suffering outside of the will of God, stop convincing yourself that it is good, because it is leading to weakness, sickness and dying.

A person who is actually joined to the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings does not have to convince themselves. They are *obtaining* the life and peace, and they know that they are in the will of God.

Suffering according to the will of God - no impediment to fellowship

Another characteristic of suffering according to the will of God is that there is no impediment to their fellowship with the presbytery or with their brethren in Christ.

If you are suffering and you have some relational disconnection from either the presbytery - because you rejected the word - or a particular person - you may have something against your brother that you will not reconcile - then your suffering is *not* according to the will of God.

It is outside of the will of God, and it is under judgement, because you are not walking in the love of God. The love of God is actually the Law that we are transgressing, which brings us under judgement.

So, a person who is suffering according to the will of God actually has no impediment in their relationship or fellowship in the body of Christ.

Weak and sick from not discerning the body

James made a notable distinction between 'suffering' and 'sickness'. He said, 'Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church.' Jas 5:13-14.

At first glance, this seems a little odd, because we would think that sickness is a form of suffering; and, of course, it is. However, the sickness that James referred to in this passage is suffering that is outside of the will of God.

We have needed to take time to understand how to pray in relation to suffering so that it is according to the will of God.

Now, James recorded that there is a suffering, or a sickness, that is outside the will of God, and that we do not pray about that.

There is a different response needed if this is the condition that we are in.

The Greek word that is translated by James as 'sick' is *astheneo*, and it is the very same word that Paul used when he explained the implications of partaking of the communion in an unworthy manner. Jas 5:14.

The sickness here is not just suffering in the fellowship of Christ; this sickness is actually *under judgement*.

'He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgement to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak [*astheneo*] and sick [a different word; *arrhostos*, meaning 'sickly'] among you, and many sleep.' 1Co 11:29-30.

When James said, 'If you are sick', he was specifically referring to the weakness that may result in sickness. However, it is particularly the weakness associated with being under the judgement of God because we are not discerning the body when we eat and drink the communion.

If that is the reason why we are suffering, we had better not pray for the Lord's blessing on that, because we are actually under the judgement of God. And if we ask the Lord to bless what He is

judging, we are actually acting contrary to His will.

This is important for us to understand, not just as we are praying individually, but as we pray for one another.

Weak in faith brings emotional distress

Obviously, the sickness that James and Paul referred to in these passages, this *astheneo*, does not refer to, for example, the common cold or a sprained ankle. That is not the sickness that he referred to when he said, 'Don't pray for that.'

Both James and Paul highlighted the fact that this sickness, or weakness, is a consequence of God's judgement. These ones are weak in faith.

It is the weakness of their *faith*. It is not, in the first instance, their physical weakness - but that is the result, because they *become* sickly. Being weak and sickly, or sick, and dying before their time is, perhaps, physically dying, but it can also be dying spiritually.

These ones are weak in faith, and the mark of the weakness in faith is that they are often in distress, emotionally and psychologically. There is mind chatter, agitation, that is constantly at work within them.

If you are weak in faith, you are motivated by fear.

Every activity that is being enacted is not by the love of God, because *faith* works by love. Some other motive is driving you.

Eating or drinking in an unworthy manner

I will remind us or summarise what it means to 'eat and drink in an unworthy manner'. It means that a person is not receiving the word; nor are they presenting themselves for priestly service on the ground of the presbytery.

There is only *one* ground for fellowship.

They are not presenting themselves for priestly service on the ground of the presbytery, which is the apostles' fellowship. They believe in their self-righteous integrity.

Being weak in faith, they may become sickly, physically and/or spiritually. The point is that we can be weak in faith, yet very healthy. And that is a very worrying condition to be in, because it means that we are not aware that we are outside the kingdom.

The Holy Spirit, who is against us at this point, causing us to become weak and sickly, actually does us the favour of *turning us back to the Lord*; turning us to the word from which we are receiving life; and compelling us, by love, to join the fellowship of love, of which He is the One who enables one-Spirit fellowship.

The answer to this sickness, or weakness, is not individual prayer or community prayer.

If we are feeling agitated and in emotional or psychological turmoil, we can 'pray our knees off' but, unless we find some illumination from outside ourselves, we will remain in that condition.

Calling for the elders

The apostle James said that if we are sick in this way, we need to call for the elders. It is not individual prayer nor community prayer that is needed. We need to call for the elders, who will pray for us and anoint us with oil.

'Calling for the elders' means that the person who is sick is *initiating toward fellowship*. They will be weak and sick, and may die before their time, because they have *disconnected* themselves from fellowship.

If we are in that condition and we know that we are, the beginning point is to call for the elders. We entreat the elders and desire that fellowship to come to our house.

'Calling for the elders' means that the person who is sick is *initiating towards fellowship* and expressing *a desire for understanding*.

We accept that we do not have *understanding*. We will be asking, 'What is happening to me, and what is the Lord saying?' We are expressing a desire for understanding so that we might know what God is confronting in our life.

We need to let go of all our thoughts about what we think the Lord is confronting in our life. Why is that? It is because we cannot know this ourselves, because we are in darkness.

If there has been a disconnection from *light*, where else can we be but in the dark.

We have to call for the elders who are bringing a *fellowship of light* so that we can see. We have to stop self-diagnosing ourselves.

Receiving illumination; seeking fellowship in the light

The beginning point to our deliverance from wrath, which is judgement, is to *receive illumination*.

We are in the darkness, which is why we may be weak in faith and sick, and may even die spiritually before our time.

The beginning point is to get into *the light*; it is to receive illumination. Illumination means turning from darkness to the light.

It is turning from *our own way* and perspective, which is outside of the will of God and under judgement. Everything that is not according to the will of God is being taken *out* through the offering of Christ; it is under judgement.

Everything that is '*in Christ*' is a chastening that is bringing us to God. This is '*in the light*'. God is light. Whatever is in God is light.

We are turning from our own way and seeking *fellowship in the light* with those who proclaim the word.

This is an *actual conversation* with those who have proclaimed the word.

It is not '*walking in the light*' *with others*. It is '*call for the elders*'; the ones who proclaim the word, which is the light in which we are to walk.

Their prayer of faith and anointing with oil brings healing to a sick person.

Healing by the prayer of faith

The first point of healing is the healing of our *ears* and the healing of our *eyes* so that we can hear the word and can *see* without the impediment of our own understanding.

That is the healing that first comes by the prayer of faith.

The prayer of faith is the prayer that has *come from that word*. It enables another person to hear it and to see it.

The prayer of faith of the elders and the anointing with oil brings healing to a sick person's hearing and sight so that the *power of darkness is broken*. We can believe for that for one another.

This is a great blessing that has been given to those who are called '*watchmen*'. Watchmen are overseers, who have grace to enable every person's

participation according to sanctification, which means to 'walk in the light'.

This is the first and most important dimension of healing.

Anointing with oil; the fellowship of one Spirit

Anointing with oil is not only the application of literal oil on a person. We know that when Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, they did, literally, *pour oil* on those who were sick.

For us, the anointing of oil is primarily *the extension of the fellowship of the Spirit* to those who are sick because of their disconnection from 'one Spirit'.

It is the extension of the fellowship of one Spirit to those who are sick, who are unable to discern the body.

If we are not seeing, or discerning, our participation in the body of Christ, it means that we are not in one Spirit with it.

The anointing oil is the extension of one Spirit to that person so that they can discern, or see, their participation in the body of Christ.

This is a *great blessing*. It is a great *healing* that this balm, or oil, brings to a person's sight. This is 'salve for the eyes'.

'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!' Psa 133:1.

Another way of saying that is, 'in a fellowship of one Spirit by the Holy Spirit'.

We can only be in *unity* if we are in one Spirit by the capacity of the Holy Spirit. Any other unity is just points of natural agreement.

'How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity [in a fellowship of one Spirit by the Holy Spirit]! It is like the precious oil upon the head [the headship of Christ, which is coming through the presbytery], running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron [priestly activity or preparation for priestly work, your participation, in this body], running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon.' Psa 133:1-3.

'The dew of Hermon' speaks of the distilling of the *water of the word*, line on line, precept upon precept. If we are jarring and hating the abundance of word which comes line on line,

precept upon precept, we are becoming weak and sick, and are dying before our time.

The word brings refreshing

If we will turn, we will realise that this beautiful word, which is like 'the dew of Hermon', is bringing refreshing and our inheritance.

This psalm connects the 'oil on the head' with the word, which is 'the dew of Hermon on the mountains'.

Blessing; life forevermore

'It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing – life forevermore.' Psa 133:3.

The blessing is *life*. If we are sick and weak, and dying before our time, we are not obtaining the blessing.

You can see why we need the anointing oil to be given to us by those who are part of this fellowship, so that we are not in the place of cursing.

We are being joined to where the blessing has been commanded *on that ground*.

'Our fellowship is with the Father and His Son' – that is where 'life forevermore' is.

Joined to a conversation of faith in relationship

We receive the prayer of the elders – many translations say, 'and they will pray *over* them'. I prefer the interpretation of that word 'over' as 'they will pray "toward" them', because it is the initiative of the word *toward* that person to grant them faith so that they can join the same conversation of which those watchmen are part.

'Over them' has a different sense to it. I can see that there is merit in that in relation to the order of headship, but I love the thought of 'toward' because it is a *relational initiative*. It is connected to the oil being poured forth on this person.

Illumination that comes by prayer and by the anointing oil for these ones who are weak and sick, and dying before their time, often brings a miraculous end to the inordinate suffering.

This is suffering that is more than is according to the will of God because they are under judgement. And, as soon as they turn and are illuminated and connected to Christ, that suffering finishes. This

is an amazing healing - and it happens very quickly.

However, illumination does not necessarily bring an end to all our suffering.

Circumcision delivers us from judgement

This is because the circumcision that brings illumination - deliverance from the *darkness* so that we can walk in the way of the light - delivers us from *judgement*.

It delivers us *into* the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

We are no longer suffering and dying outside of the will of God. Now we are able to be joined to suffering which is *according to the will of God*, which results in *blessing* - life forevermore.

We receive the resurrection life of God that is in the blood of Jesus Christ

In the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, His blood is being spilled. And His blood contains the resurrection life of God; *exanastasis* - resurrection life in a mortal body.

In this fellowship, we are recipients of the *exanastasis* life that is in the blood of Christ.

We are no longer perishing, bereft of life, trying to sustain it, or at least having the appearance of it. Now we are completely at rest and peace because *we are obtaining eternal life* - right here, right now, in our mortal body in the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

This is why the apostle James said, 'The prayer of faith will save the sick.' This person is sick because they are under judgement. The prayer is saving them by joining them to this fellowship; and then, '*the Lord will raise him up*'. Jas 5:15.

That prayer has taken them from outside of the context of *judgement*, into the *fellowship of the body of Christ*, which is fellowship with the presbytery, which is fellowship with the Father and Son. In that fellowship, knitted and joined to Christ, they are obtaining the resurrection life by which they are being raised up by Christ.

That is *healing* from the sickness that is leading to spiritual death.

So, if you are sick, call for the elders. They will pray for you and anoint you with oil, and it will save your soul.

Forgiveness is ministered to the poor in spirit

The apostle James said, 'And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.'

Sin is *missing the mark* of what God has for you. It is *unsanctified activity*. 'Sanctified' simply means being consistent with what God has said for you.

And, if you have been deviating and you receive this prayer, and this oil, you will be forgiven.

That means you will be *reconnected* with your sanctification, *fully equipped* and enabled to *participate* in the life and culture of the body.

This is the evidence of *blessing*.

This is where the blessing was commanded - 'life forevermore'. This is the city of Zion. The mountains of Zion, where the city of Jerusalem, the holy city, is, is where our citizenship is.

Forgiveness is *ministered* to the blessed who are *poor in spirit* and *mourn*. If we are asking for someone to come and pray for us and to anoint us with oil, we are accepting that we cannot save ourselves.

This is the beginning of being 'poor in spirit', and the beginning of obtaining the blessing which God commands over His people. We are a recipient of it because we are poor in spirit and mourning.

The forgiveness of our sin is *deliverance* from our own way, and establishment in our sanctification as part of the body of Christ.

The weak in faith; sin leading to death

It is important that we understand the difference between praying for those who are suffering and who have *a testimony* in their speech and in their conduct of fellowship with Christ in His offering and suffering, and prayer for those who are sick because they are *weak in faith*.

We need to make a *very clear distinction* and to understand this difference. If we do not, we may be found to petition the Lord to bless those who are *rebellious*.

If we are speaking that way, we are not speaking according to the covenant purpose of God. It is 'another' conversation that is birthed in *our own carnal, or fleshly, perspective* on what God should do, how He should do it, and how He should gather up those who are outside of His fellowship.

The apostle John made this very clear.

'If anyone sees [as those who are watchmen. They are the ones who have the eyes to see.] his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death [That one who is seeing is the elder who has come because someone has called him to pray for them. This is seeing a person whose sin does not lead to death. It's not leading to death, because they are beginning to cry out in repentance.], he will ask, and He [the Son] will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death.' 1Jn 5:16.

We *are* going to aberrate at times, and we do need to confess our trespasses, our aberrances and our frailties to one another; and we are to pray for one another so that we might be healed.

'There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.' 1Jn 5:16.

'Sin leading to death' is the sin of person who, in their rebellion, maintains their 'right' to rebellion. That is the weak and the sickly who are *dying spiritually*. If they will not turn, that is 'sin leading to death'.

We have to be careful that we are able to bear witness of this in another, *in the Spirit*, because we are supposed to be of one Spirit, of the testimony of the one who is committed to the apostles' fellowship, and we are praying with them, commending them to the grace of God.

But if they do not want the grace of God because they will not receive the word, that is praying for one who is in 'sin leading to death'. The apostle John said, 'Don't pray for that.'

Prayer meetings – a participation in the fellowship of the body of Christ

Weekly prayer meetings from house to house are an *absolutely foundational* point of participation in prayer.

The foundation of prayer is one of the *dimensions of fellowship*, and these prayer meetings from house to house are under the stewardship of the presbytery.

The *four foundations of grace*, or the four dimensions of grace, which are foundational to the fellowship of the church, house of God, are under the stewardship of the presbytery. This means that house to house prayer is to be stewarded by the presbytery.

Every believer who is part of a church community is encouraged to participate in prayer meetings, including the children of these families.

I know that it is a stretch for some families to take their children to prayer meetings, because there is school and other activities that they are engaged in

However, in the world, we note that much effort goes into swimming training or music practices, all sorts of activities where families are motivated to give themselves which are not leading to any life.

We, as families, can be diligent and can be committed, where possible, to a *whole family participation* in prayer meetings and to teach our children to participate in prayer meetings also.

Now, of course, that is not a blanket statement or expectation, but it is an *exhortation to faith*.

Where possible, get to prayer meetings.

Now, in this season of social restrictions, many prayer groups in our fellowship of churches have utilised on-line conferencing platforms. This has proven to be a really useful tool to include everyone, particularly people who would otherwise be unable to attend - the elderly, the infirm, mothers with infants, babies and very little children.

We would encourage, as a presbytery, the ongoing use of these platforms to support the participation of these ones who cannot get to a prayer meeting. However, where possible, we should be encouraged to physically gather for weekly prayer together.

I encourage you to that as part of our *participation* in this foundation of the *fellowship of the body of Christ*.

House to house prayer – a spiritual activity

House to house prayer is to be a *spiritual* activity.

This is no different from any context of prayer. We should be encouraged to *wait* on the Lord together. When we gather together for prayer meetings on whatever mornings are part of our local church program, be encouraged to *wait on the Lord* together and to *pray in the Holy Spirit*.

Our prayer meetings should demonstrate the *four aspects of incense*, which can either be spoken or sung.

The beginning point is the *Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit is the One who *enables our prayer*, whether it is individual, family or community prayer, to be connected to the *conversation* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So, we need to take time to pray in the Holy Spirit when we are praying together, house to house. These four aspects of incense should be part of our prayer expression as a community.

The four dimensions of incense, of prayer

The first dimension, or aspect, of incense is the offering of *praise, worship and thanksgiving* to God the Father.

The second dimension is prayer for our participation as a community in *the will of God* being done through offering.

The third dimension is the *prophetic word* which is for edification, exhortation and comfort which is made more sure in our lives.

There should be a prophetic element, both the *articulation* of the prophetic word and our ability to *receive* it in our prayer meetings; and that might also be a devotional word. This is our *daily bread*.

The fourth dimension is the *confession of faith* expressed through *testimony*. This means testifying as we come together to pray. But it will also be the testimony to the Lord, in prayer, of the life that we are receiving as a community.

We can see that our prayer meetings are going to be quite dynamic and include an element of *prophecy* and *testimony*.

This will be somewhat different from what people have come to expect of prayer meetings.

Previously, we have had a list of things that we needed to pray for, and we worked our way through that list.

Praying according to that list is *not prayer by the Spirit* because, when we come to pray, if we are mature, we know that *we do not even know how to pray as we ought*.

That does not change when we come to pray as a community.

When we come as a community, we are submitting to the *leading of the Spirit*, praying by the Spirit, so that those four dimensions of incense are the expression of our prayer.

This means that the way in which we have been praying will need to mature and grow and multiply in order to see these four elements demonstrated. We are to have those four elements in *equal measure*.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean that we need 'a time' for thanksgiving; 'a time' to pray for the will of God; 'a time' for prophecy; then 'a time' for testimony.

Remember that the spices were all mixed together. That would be crazy to do that! That would just be the imposition of an 'incense law' on our prayer.

That is not what we are saying. We are saying that, as we are *in the Spirit*, we will see a need to allow for, and to foster, these four expressions.

The hosting of our prayer meetings

This means that our meetings need hosting and encouragement and exemplification by those who are mature, firstfruits believers. Those who are praying spiritually will be those who are mature. It is a *priestly* activity.

We need people to host prayer meetings, but not because they are directing the way that we should pray or demanding everyone follow a certain protocol. It is because they are *exemplifying the culture* and are joining everyone to the culture that is *in the Spirit*.

Prayer meetings need hosting, encouragement and *exemplification*. That means that the one who is hosting is hosting because they can *demonstrate* this prayer principle; those who are mature, firstfruits believers who are themselves connected in fellowship with the presbytery.

Immaturities need to be put off in our praying

As we look to grow and mature in our prayer fellowship, house to house, there will be immaturities that we need to put off.

I'm sure you would agree that has been true along the whole way of our journey, in the word. We are accepting that there are things to put off and things to put on.

This will be so in relation to how we pray as a community together. This will include ceasing from praying from the basis of our *anxieties* or according to our *opinions* or our *perceptions* of matters and people. That is fleshly prayer.

We also must cease from praying *at* people, endeavouring to make a point to others through our prayer. We may try to speak to another person because we know their particular issue and say, 'I pray that we would all stop being such grumbling, complaining, rebellious people. I pray that you would help those ones who are not on "the right page".'

In this case, we are praying *at* people, trying to get their attention or trying to communicate a point to them, which is just bringing the *filth* of our own opinion onto the *holy ground* of prayer. We must cease from that. That is childish.

Our prayer should be *by the Spirit* in *conversation* with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We are not praying to 'make a point'. We are praying according to the Spirit and according to *His will*.

This is why we don't need a list of things to pray for. Those prayer needs will be specific to those who are in that prayer meeting.

Community prayer is participation in body ministry

Community prayer is the first and foundational point of *participation in body ministry*.

This is why the prayer meetings on Friday morning, for example, which is the way we do it in Brisbane, are connected to the body ministry of the Sunday morning communion. It begins with that conversation in prayer on Friday.

Some of us can be self-conscious about praying because we hear others pray and we think that our prayers are too simple or too short. We have only a few words or a couple of sentences. We are not very fluent, stumbling and weak in speech, like the apostle Paul perhaps; or we are not theologically 'rich' in comparison to what we hear others say.

No-one's prayer is heard because they are theologically rich, fluent or eloquent.

They are heard because they are *by the Spirit*.

It is *the speaking by faith* that matters.

So, if you have *heard* the word and you have *believed* it and *received* it, and you have *the faith of the Son of God*, then you need to speak whatever expression comes from that faith.

And I encourage you that this is the foundation of body ministry. This is the most basic point of participation in offering - to *offer to speak in prayer*.

Do not draw back from praying because you do not think you have the eloquence or articulation to pray.

This is true for children, as well. I encourage you, children, when you are in prayer meeting, that you do not need to be confident that you know and understand exactly what needs to be prayed. What the Lord is calling you to do is to *open your mouth* and *join*.

And this can be joining in *singing*. This can be joining in *praying*. It can be joining in *agreeing*.

Prayer is *a fellowship of participation*.

It is *a fellowship of speaking*. If we go to pray, we need to *speak*.

I exhort us all to be ready, even though some will feel a little conspicuous and a little weak. That is great! It is not *your* capacity that we want to hear.

We want to hear *the ministry of the Spirit* and the beautiful *fragrant incense* that is ascending to God as we are all joined to that fellowship.