

Better Together

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, June 6, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today! Whether you are here in person or watching via the livestream, you are most welcome. Please have a Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes. We have much to cover in a relatively short amount of time.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

As the pandemic appears to be moving to a close (i.e., Lord willing), I find myself looking back over the past year wondering what lessons I have—or should have—learned. Thus said, I posed the following questions at a recent Thursday Night Bible Study:

Q. What have you learned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?

Q. How has this season of life and living impacted or influenced you?

NOTE 1 – I do not want to entertain your answers at this time, as this is simply not the best setting for such a dialogue. Rather, I want to identify something that has been reaffirmed and reinforced in my heart and mind in this extended fourteen-month-plus season. Namely, there is nothing like being together as the people of God and as the Church of Jesus Christ.

NOTE 2 – This has been a season of masks, social distancing, and separation. I would say that, to varying degrees, we have all felt the ill-effects of such a season! Though I praise the Lord for Zoom, Facebook and/or YouTube livestreams, and all we have been able to accomplish over the last year, there is absolutely no substitute for being together.

KEY – Like it or not, we are relational beings, and the following assessment of the Lord holds true:

Genesis 2:18 (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

18 “It is **not** good for the man to be **alone**.”

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

We were meant to function together.

NOTE 1 – Though Christianity is an intensely private faith (i.e., in that you must personally trust Christ to secure life eternal and in that you will stand before Him alone in judgment), it is also corporate in nature. Though the Bible places great emphasis upon our vertical connection with God, it never does so at the expense of our horizontal obligations. In fact, the best evidence of your love for God is your love for others (cf. Matt. 22:37–40; 25:31–46).

NOTE 2 – I posit that we are better together! In fact, I would like to take some time to explore the biblical emphasis on “togetherness” (i.e., considering those things that we do and/or are to do together in Christ Jesus our Lord). Let us delve in...

BETTER TOGETHER PT. 1

Firstly, we are a people meant to pray together.

NOTE 1 – It is true that Scripture places a premium on private prayer (as the following text illustrates):

Matthew 6:5–6

5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

NOTE 2 – However, this in no way diminishes the place and the importance of corporate prayer! Those who would use this passage to forbid public prayer entirely need only to read on to the verses that follow. Note the following:

Matthew 6:9–13

9 “This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 10 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
 11 Give us today our daily bread.
 12 And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
 13 And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from the evil one.’”

KEY – Consider the opening term of the Lord’s Prayer: “OUR.” There is inherently a “communal” aspect herein! It was the intent of the Lord for His people to appeal to the Lord together. It is worth noting that the Early Church exemplified a commitment to such prayer (i.e., and with incredible result):

Acts 1:12–14 (Post-Ascension, Emphasis Mine)

12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined **together** constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. . . .

Acts 2:1–4 (Ten Days Later)

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all **together** in one place [Q. What do you think they were doing?]. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 4:23–31 (Following the Arrest and Threat of Peter and John, Emphasis Mine)

23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices **together in prayer** to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“‘Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
26 The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one.’

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 **After they prayed**, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 12:1–5 (In a Season of Kingdom Expansion and Revival)

1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. 5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly **praying** to God for him.

Q. What do you think happened to Peter in response to their prayers?

A. He was supernaturally released and restored to the people and work of God!

KEY – These examples are merely the tip of the iceberg regarding the place of corporate prayer. We could spend the whole of this year examining example after example and still not explore them all! Yet I would call us to mimic such examples, being a church that prays together.

BETTER TOGETHER PT. 2

Secondly, we are a people meant to worship together.

NOTE 1 – It is true that Scripture records moving moments of passionate private worship:

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
 he leads me beside quiet waters,
 3 he refreshes my soul.
 He guides me along the right paths
 for his name's sake.
 4 Even though I walk
 through the darkest valley,
 I will fear no evil,
 for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff,
 they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me
 in the presence of my enemies.
 You anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.

6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
 all the days of my life,
 and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
 forever.

Q. What do we see herein?

A. A moving moment of personal worship!

NOTE 2 – Yet this in no way diminishes the biblical emphasis on communal or corporate worship!

Psalm 22:22 (Emphasis Mine)

22 I will declare your name to my people;
 in the assembly I will praise you.

Psalm 95:1–7 (Emphasis Mine)

1 Come, let **us** sing for joy to the Lord;
 let **us** shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
 2 Let **us** come before him with thanksgiving
 and extol him with music and song.
 3 For the Lord is the great God,
 the great King above all gods.
 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth,
 and the mountain peaks belong to him.

5 The sea is his, for he made it,
 and his hands formed the dry land.
 6 Come, let **us** bow down in worship,
 let **us** kneel before the Lord our Maker;
 7 for he is **our** God
 and **we** are the people of his pasture,
 the flock under his care.

NOTE 3 – The Early Church demonstrated a commitment to such worship with corresponding result:

Acts 13:1–3 (Beginning of the Missionary Journeys of Paul)

1 Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 16:25–34 (In the Midst of a Latter Missionary Journey of Paul)

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone’s chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

31 They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

Q. What do we see in each of these accounts?

A. Moments of corporate worship and a corresponding divine response!

KEY – These examples are merely the tip of the iceberg regarding the place of corporate worship. We could spend the whole of this year examining example after example and still not explore them all! Yet I would call us to mimic such examples, being a church that worships together.

BETTER TOGETHER PT. 3

Thirdly, we are a people meant to serve and/or minister together.

NOTE 1 – It is true that the Bible records moments of effective personal ministry. Consider one such example:

Acts 9:10–19 (Following the Conversion of Saul of Tarsus)

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

11 The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

13 “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

NOTE 2 – Yet this does not diminish the biblical record re: believers ministering together:

Mark 6:6b–13 (Emphasis Mine)

6 . . . Jesus went around teaching from village to village. 7 Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out **two by two** and gave them authority over impure spirits.

8 These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. 9 Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. 10 Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

12 They went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Luke 10:1–2 Emphasis Mine)

1 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them **two by two** ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2 He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Acts 2:1–4, 14 (Emphasis Mine)

1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all **together** in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. . . . 14 Then Peter stood up **with the Eleven**, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say [i.e., wherein his sermon results in the salvation of 3,000 individuals].”

Acts 3:1–10

1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. 4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6 Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. 9 When all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Q. What do we see in each of these accounts?

A. Moments of corporate ministry and the corresponding result!

KEY – These examples are merely the tip of the iceberg regarding the place of serving together. We could spend the whole of this year examining example after example and still not explore them all! Yet I would call us to mimic such examples, being a church that serves together.

BETTER TOGETHER PT. 4

Fourthly, we are a people meant to share life together (i.e., the good, the bad and the ugly).

NOTE 1 – Scripture calls us to share moments of great joy, good news and celebration:

Romans 12:15a (Emphasis Mine)

15 “**Rejoice** with those who **rejoice** . . .”

FYI 1 – It is a joy to share good, pleasant news with the community of faith. It is also a privilege to share in the joyfulness of others. There is absolutely no substitute for the celebratory encouragement of the people of God and of the Church of Christ!

NOTE 2 – However, Scripture also calls us to share moments of tragedy, sorrow and loss:

Romans 12:15 (Emphasis Mine)

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; **mourn** with those who **mourn**.

FYI 2 – It is a joy to have a spiritual family to rely upon in the midst of affliction and adversity. It is also a joy to be a present help for others in their adversity. There is no substitute for the comforting presence of God in and through His people!

KEY 1 – Herein we see the operation of the principle(s) espoused by the apostle Paul:

1 Corinthians 12:12–14, 26

12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. . . . 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

KEY 2 – We do well to remember that we are all in this thing together. There is ‘power’ in sharing life together:

Acts 2:42–47 (Emphasis Mine)

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

BETTER TOGETHER PT. 5

Lastly, we are a people meant to remember together.

Q. What do I mean by this?

A. Christ Himself instituted this lasting ordinance for His Church:

Luke 22:14–20 (Emphasis Mine)

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” 17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” 19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in **remembrance** of me.” 20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

KEY 1 – Throughout space and time the people of God have paused in the midst of frenzied living and dire circumstance to consider and commemorate the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. For nearly two-thousand-years the Church has observed the Lord’s Supper together (i.e., being connected by a common need and common Savior)...

KEY 2 – And here we are, once again, to obey the standing order of the Lord: to remember!

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

CONCLUSION

KEY – It is my hope and prayer that we rediscover the value of “togetherness” now more than ever. We must reject any form of Christianity that places no emphasis or priority on being together in Christ. Let us heed the call of the ancient biblical writer:

Hebrews 10:24–25 (Emphasis Mine)

24 . . . let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 **not giving up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Thank you for joining us today. Those who wish to give online may do so at www.NewLifeBarre.org. Those who wish to give in person can utilize the offering boxes located throughout the church facility. I close this service with the following blessing...

Numbers 6:24–26

24 ““The Lord bless you
and keep you;
25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.””