

Do corporate (group) prayers have more power than individual prayers?

I've found no specific Scripture to indicate that a group praying together accesses supercharged prayer not possible for the individual. Both types of prayer are taught and modeled in Scripture.

Prayer, corporate or individual, isn't about changing God's mind or bending His will to our way of thinking. Matthew 6:8 (NASB) says, "...for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Prayer is our time to focus on God, and allow Him to replace our desires with His own.

The New Testament has much to say on corporate prayer.

1. Let's begin with the example prayer Jesus taught His disciples in response to their desire to learn to pray. Refer to Matthew 6:8-13 and Luke 11:2-4. Note that Jesus taught using language that indicated a collective or community prayer based on words such as *our* Father, give *us*, forgive *us*, deliver *us*, and so on.

2. Some point to Matthew 18:19-20 to support the notion of more power in group prayer versus individual prayer. Read the verses in context, though, and we discover the topic is church discipline. Pulling verses from context and attaching meaning is a dangerous practice.

Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.

Matthew 18:19-20 NASB

3. Note the actions of the disciples immediately following Jesus's departure. Pay special attention to this phrase, "These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer." Jesus left instructions they were to wait for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). Rather than watch the clock, the group prayed. They wanted to remain ready for God's next step and praying hones the edge of our spirituality.

When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Acts 1:13-14 NASB

4. During the wait described above, the disciples chose a replacement for Judas. While they narrowed the field based on specific parameters, they needed God's direction for the final choice. The group sought that direction through prayer.

And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen.

Acts 1:24 NASB

5. Prayer became an identifying practice of the early church along with preaching and fellowship.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 2:42 NASB

6. As persecution arose for the early church the group united in prayer to ask for boldness to continue serving God. (Don't miss God's answer in Acts 4:31!)

And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord...

Acts 4:24 NASB Selected

7. The church grew and internal friction developed over care of a specific subset of their widows. The apostles could not oversee food distribution and maintain their focus on prayer and ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). The solution was to select helpers, the first deacons. Note that commissioning this group included corporate prayer.

And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

Acts 6:6 NASB

8. Persecution intensified and Herod killed James the brother of John. Peter was arrested and his execution date was set. How did the church respond?

So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

Acts 12:5 NASB

Peter was miraculously freed from prison. Where would he go and who would he tell? How about the group at John Mark's house praying fervently for his release?

And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

Acts 12:12 NASB

9. Missionaries, Saul (Paul) and Barnabas, chosen by the Holy Spirit were commissioned and sent out. The church at Antioch prayed over these men in preparation for their ministry.

Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 13:3 NASB

10. Paul would later send his young friend Timothy instructions for Timothy's role as an elder. The young pastor was urged to make prayer a priority.

Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.

1 Timothy 2:8 NASB

11. John, the last surviving apostle, wrote the book of Revelation. That work includes descriptions of scenes in heaven. Note the role the prayers of the saints play.

Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne.

Revelation 8:3 NASB

And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

Revelation 8:4 NASB

12. Group prayer offers practical benefits.

- My daughter suggests adding horses means we can load more on the wagon, and in prayer more hands make the load lighter. We have much to pray about, and while one person cannot exhaust the list perhaps by sharing the requests with a group we can cover more.
- Praying together gives purpose and builds unity. See 1 Peter 3:7 where Peter explained that conflict in marriage can hinder our prayer lives.
- Our minds often wander during prayer, especially when we pray alone. Praying with others might help maintain our focus.
- Corporate prayer is a good school for those new to the Christian life. By hearing others pray we can learn to pray ourselves. Those uncomfortable with praying aloud can pray silently, and God is capable of hearing everyone at once.
- Seeing God answer the group's prayer drives the group to pray even more.

Resources: (Links are valid as of 8/18/15)

A compilation of Bible verses on group prayer (mostly).

http://www.openbible.info/topics/corporate_prayer

This site answers these questions, “Is corporate prayer important? Is corporate prayer more powerful than an individual praying alone?”

<http://www.gotquestions.org/corporate-prayer.html>

A sermon entitled “The Priority of Praying Together - Acts 6” by Lloyd Stillely drawn from John Franklin’s, *And the Place Was Shaken*.

<http://www.lifeway.com/Article/sermon-when-the-church-prays-the-priority-of-praying-together-acts-6-1-5>

A description of corporate prayer.

<http://www.allaboutprayer.org/corporate-prayer.htm>

Copyright © 2015, John W. Nichols. All rights reserved.
Permission is granted by the author for personal, classroom, or church group use.