

The secret to spiritual power

Rev. Dr. David Thompson May 28, 2023.

Johnny paid his way through college by waitering in a restaurant.

"What's the usual tip?" asked a customer.

"Well," said Johnny, "this is my first day, but my support group said that, if I got five dollars out of you, I'd be doing great."

"Is that so?" growled the customer. "In that case, here's twenty dollars."

"Thanks. I'll put it in my college fund," Johnny said.

"By the way, what are you studying?" asked the customer.

"Applied psychology."

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight
O Lord our strength and our Redeemer.

Texts:

"If our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade you at all, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, **then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind.**"

From the feast of Pentecost: The disciples used to meet by common consent in the Portico of Solomon. The number of men and woman who came to believe increased steadily. The disciples preached everyday in the temple and in private houses...

If you have been a Christian for awhile you probably know that there are three answers to prayer: Yes, no and slow. No and slow are the hardest to deal with, especially in prayer.

On one occasion mentioned in Luke 11 verse one, Jesus disciples asked him how to pray. Out of that came the **Lord's Prayer**. It can also be strongly argued, that in addition to prayer in secret, which Christ also advocated when he said "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray in secret", he also advocated the importance of **group** prayer. We still recognize that today when we all say the Lord's Prayer together as a group.

Many people think that was all he taught his disciples about prayer. How are we to pray? Answer? The Lord's prayer, end of story...

But, there is striking evidence that the historical Jesus taught his followers to gather in small prayer circles as an essential part of the formation of the Christian Church. And he went further than that as we find in St. Paul when Paul carried on the legacy. Paul said: "**Be united in your convictions and united in your love with a common purpose and a common mind.**"

The word **Homothumadon** is a Greek word used 10 times in the book of the Acts out of its 12 occurrences in the New Testament.

It is essentially a musical term, a compound of two words meaning “rush along” and “in unison”. It means with one mind, with one accord, with one passion. When a Beethoven symphony comes together, a diversity of instruments begins to rush along together with passion and common purpose and common mind and the result is an amazing possibility of beauty to uplift the human spirit.

This is how we are to pray in groups, passionately with one heart and one mind and then when we do this, something wonderful has the possibility of happening...

In Acts 2 verse one in the King James version it says “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all **with one accord** in one place.” Thus began the formation of the Christian Church with the coming of the Holy Spirit. It was a very big deal. The incredible signal for the beginning of the church was the equivalent of the UN; everybody heard what was being said in Aramaic in their own tongue. The preparation for the Christian church was for the followers of Jesus to be of one accord and passion with a common purpose and a common mind.

The group prayer model for the book of the Acts was also to be in homothumadon, this word described how they are to pray together and so in that state of mind of unity, they were to be “in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.”

The early church ate together from house to house eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. (Homothumadon)

The apostles used to meet **with one accord** in Solomon’s porch in the outer Temple, and then miracles took place, so much so that the sick were taken out into the streets and laid on beds and sleeping mats, in the hope that at least the shadow of Peter might fall across some of them as he walked past. People even came crowding in from the towns round about Jerusalem, bringing their sick with them...and all of them were cured.

Charles Spurgeon a British Baptist preacher, **said that this is an overlooked secret of the early church**. Spurgeon says: Over and over again Luke stresses that what they did, they did together, all of them, united and unanimous.”

According to Spurgeon and Scripture, Jesus gave authority to his disciples to cure diseases. They were to go from village to village preaching the kingdom of God and healing the sick. **They were to do this with one mind and common purpose.**

Alan Cohen in his book Dare to be yourself tells the story of a man who had AIDS back in the days when there was no treatment. When the man told the seminar that Alan was holding, that he had AIDS, Alan stopped the seminar and asked everyone to stand, extend their arms and send him love. They did that. It was a homothumadon moment of spiritual power! They were of one accord sending the man loving thoughts...healing thoughts.

Some years later when Alan was holding a seminar in the same place the man returned and told the audience that he had been healed on that day and no longer had AIDS.

When I read that story, it resonated with me for I know from my own experience as a minister **that a group of people praying and loving together, can heal the sick..**

In the Jewish tradition a group of at least ten people called minyans come together to pray for the healing of a member of the congregation in public prayer. The tradition is old and Jesus would have known of it.

The prayer is better when it is very clear and specific. Visualization seems to strengthen it. **We play through the mind what we wish to experience as if it were already a present reality.** When we do this as a group it is very powerful spiritually. So you see the sick person as being healthy, as you pray.

We need to remember always, that prayer is a higher causality. We have control of a lot of things today in medicine. That is the action that we can take.

But in prayer we respectfully ask God to get involved and there are three typical answers to prayers: Yes, no, and slow. But there is always with God the possibility of miracle and this seems to be connected to our faith. If you have faith as much as a grain of mustard seed...

Jesus said this about visualizing the outcome we would ask for in prayer: He said, "Whatsoever things you ask for in prayer, believe that you have them already and they shall be yours."

He also said "Where two or three of you are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst."

Knox as we all know has sold this building. This places us in a moment of opportunity because the financial burden has been lifted for the maintenance and insurance of the building.

In a sense we can learn a lot from Pentecost. The disciples owned no buildings and Christians did not own buildings to worship in for 300 years or so. They met on the first day of the week in places like the Roman Catacombs. They also met, and this is vital for Knox, they met in small groups in private homes. No building? Meet in homes!

If we are to grow this church once again, we can take a leaf out of the Evangelical churches' playbook and link large group settings with small group settings.

At New St. James in London there was a Bible study that met every week. They could have met in homes but they ended up in the church parlour. The leader used the lectionary for the church year. The group would read the passages of scripture taking turns until they all were read. The leader always printed off commentary from the Internet that was suitable for Presbyterian interpretation of Scripture.

Then the leader would throw it open for people to discuss. I attended as Interim minister and what I discovered was that this small group was bonded together. I became very fond of them and they of me. They took me in. I wanted to be there.

They also were connected to the large group worship because what they had talked about and shared, ended up in the church worship service.

When I came to New St. James, I always shared with the leader what scriptures I was going

to use for the Sunday worship and I got six weeks ahead so that the musician could choose music that was in sympathy with the theme of the service. It worked fabulously well.

Covid has separated us and denied us socialization. Mental health problems are on the rise because of it. Small groups, sometimes called bubbles by health experts, were an attempt to bridge the gaps created by Covid. As restrictions ease, Knox has an opportunity to rebuild social groups that people really need for their emotional, physical, mental and spiritual health.

If these groups are built with unity and love, bonding will take place.

The groups can be about anything that interests the group: cars, books, movies, hobbies . You name it, it can work if people are interested. As bonds build with church people in small groups, the worship service can uplift, teach, celebrate and be an engine for goodness in the community.

That is what the early church did when they met in homes and in Solomon's porch. And they did this without a building for 300 years. And during that period the church grew and grew and grew! What built it? Unity. They were of one accord. They were excited, bonded, dynamic!

If you have a chance some day drive to Innerkip. Look for the old church on the main street. Last time I saw it, it was a wool shop.

But if you drive by on the outskirts of town you will see a sign for IPC: Innerkip Presbyterian Church. They had over 1500 members last time I saw their stats and cars park all over their front lawn on a Sunday. The secret?

Small life groups of people of similar ages and interests, linked together with a worship service. Large group and small group.

Be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind.

Here is how one small group was built around a cancer diagnosis.

Dawn Stobbe was a nurse who had the symptoms of cancer. Her doctor did tests. The results were terrifying: a large tumour and the blood tests indicated the possible presence of ovarian cancer.

Dawn thought to herself "I'm going to die! She wept bitterly.

She stayed calm as she told her daughters that she had cancer. They were just teens and when she saw the fear in their eyes her heart nearly broke. So, not wanting to burden them with her fear she said that she had to run to the store.

On the way she pictured in her mind all the faces she loved. Rich, her husband, her girls and their five other children through previous marriages, her parents and her friends.

"O God she pleaded, please don't take my life. I still have so much to live for."

She went to her priest who gave her the best advice in the world. He said "**Don't try to withstand this alone! Let others help you!**"

The next day all the faces she had pictured, who loved her, were in her home at her invitation on the advice of her priest, surrounding her with their love. **Homothoumadon!** They were of one accord.

They continued to meet and support her through the surgery. The surgeons took her fallopian tubes and ovaries. One doctor told her “You only have a 15% chance of making it. Your only hope is chemotherapy.”

She bargained like crazy with God. She would be a better everything, if only she would get a second chance at life.

She had six chemo treatments, one every three weeks. Sometimes they made her very sick, but always a friend would show up with dinner or to take the girls out. Her friends even raised money to look after the medical bills. **Homothoumadon.** Buoyed by their love and support, she read books and visualized herself getting well.

All her support group stayed positive. Her daughters particularly said “You are going to be alright mom.”

After the last chemo treatment, the moment came to find out whether she was cancer free.

The doctors were to do 100 biopsies one in every place they feared the cancer might have spread to. “To be honest” they said, “we don’t expect you to be cancer free.” Her chances of survival were so slim.

Dawn could feel terror creeping into every fibre of her being. A friend who had visited her in her home had given her a hand painted rock which Dawn had put into a drawer. Before Dawn left for the hospital she reached into the drawer and pulled it out. She read the words; “Expect a miracle!” She now slipped it into her purse.

The stone was still in her purse the next day when she opened her eyes, after the surgeries. She found a pretty woman with dark hair and a white dress leaning over her hospital bed.

She must be a nurse Dawn thought. But she had no pills in her hand, no blood pressure monitor, to hook up. Instead, she looked at Dawn kindly and asked, “Are you the one looking for a miracle?”

Confused Dawn stammered “Yes.” *But Dawn wondered how did she know?* But before the question could be asked the pretty woman had vanished.

The next morning, the woman in white was beside her once again. In her hand was a plaque that read “Miracles happen every day!” Is this what you are looking for?” she asked gently.

Tears sprang to Dawn’s eyes but before she could say a word, once again the woman was gone. As Dawn gazed at the plaque a funny tingling sensation began to course throughout her body. Was she a nurse or an angel?

Her husband Rich came in and said to Dawn “The results of the biopsies are in. They were negative- each and every one!”

“If our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade you at all, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, **then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind.**

Dawn was cancer free. And as the pretty woman in white came to assure her, **hopes are never foolish, and prayers are never wasted, especially where two or three gather in Jesus' name.**

Amen.