

# United in Prayer

*February 12, 2023*

## Lesson Summary

### ***Main Passages***

Acts 1:12-14; Luke 11:1-4

### ***Session Outline***

1. United in Prayer (Acts 1:12-14)
2. Powerful Prayer (Luke 11:1)
3. Model Prayer (Luke 11:2-4)

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### ***Theological Theme***

Prayer is vital in the life of Christ-followers. It is spoken about, preached about, and taught about often, yet Christians still struggle with this discipline.





## Leader Guide

# United in Prayer

### Introduction

Have you ever run out of gas or power in your vehicle? There are those who stop and fill up when they have less than half a tank, those who stop as soon as the warning light comes on, and those who wait until the last second just to see how many miles they can actually go on their previous tank or charge.

No matter where you fall on the scale of adding fuel to your tank or power to your battery, the one thing all people can agree on is that without fuel in the tank or power for the battery, a vehicle won't run. You must be intentional about your power or fuel source to use a vehicle to its maximum effectiveness. It is also important to note that the power charge or fuel you use needs to be correct or you may damage your vehicle. **Today we are talking about an important type of "fuel" for faith that every Christ-follower needs to prioritize.**

-  What are your common practices when it comes to refueling your car?
-  Have you ever had a fuel mishap? What happened?


### Session Summary

As Jesus prepared to ascend into heaven after the resurrection, **He gave the disciples instructions to wait for the coming Holy Spirit.** They did exactly as He told them and spent time in an upper room together, unified in prayer. Today, **the Holy Spirit is still the difference-maker and fuels a believer's prayer life.**

Most Christians recognize how important prayer is to their walk with Christ, yet most would also admit that they struggle with prayer. The disciples had questions about prayer too, so they took their need to Jesus so that they might grow in this area.

## 1. United in Prayer (Acts 1:12-14)

At the end of the forty days following Jesus's resurrection, His disciples obeyed His final instructions and met together in an upper room to wait for the Holy Spirit. There was no delay in their actions, and we don't read anything about them questioning Him. They trusted their Savior and believed what He promised would happen. Even though He was no longer with them physically, they chose to obey what they heard from Jesus.

 Why do we struggle to trust, believe, obey, and apply what Jesus tells us to do instead of primarily questioning His instructions?

Acts 1:15 says there were about 120 people waiting together in the upper room. Imagine all the disciples—minus Judas, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, various brothers of Jesus, and other followers—gathered in one room. There were likely many strong personalities and opinions in the room. There were likely various stages of joy and grief being experienced too.

We don't have a lot of details about what happened in the waiting period, except that they were all in one accord. This is another way of saying they were unified. While this may seem like a small detail, it was significant given the context of their waiting and the reality that unity is difficult for any group of people, no matter the context. Tensions may have been running high, and it was a situation that easily could have devolved into a competition for who would be in charge and decide the next steps for the group. How often in today's world would an eclectic group of people confined into a limited space be unified?


 What would you say is required for a group to find unity?

The key to the people's unity was tied to their focus. Scripture tells us they devoted themselves to prayer. As they continually sought the Lord in prayer, He knit their hearts together in unity. That is a powerful lesson for the church. When a body of believers prays together and continually seeks the Lord, He can do amazing and powerful things among them.

These people were the core of believers who would spread the gospel as Jesus called them to do. Their actions displayed wisdom. In the middle of a difficult time, they obeyed the Lord. They gathered in fellowship and devoted themselves to prayer. These are the same things that present day Christ-followers should be involved in to experience the power of Christ at work in and through us.


### The Upper Room

The ascension took place on the Mount of Olives, a "Sabbath day's journey" from Jerusalem (about three-fourths of a mile). The disciples gathered in an upper room, complying with Jesus' instruction to await the coming of the Spirit. It was a large group, numbering 120 (v. 15). In Palestinian homes, the top floors were often without partitions. Only the upper floor of a large house would accommodate such a crowd. Their main concern was prayer. Indeed, prayer was a hallmark of the earliest church (1:24; 2:42; 3:1; 4:24; 6:6). Among the women whom Luke mentions were those who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee and witnessed His crucifixion (Luke 8:2; 23:55; 24:10).

 Application: How much does our group model the actions of the early followers of Christ? How might we do that to a greater extent?


## 2. Powerful Prayer (Luke 11:1)

Have you ever heard someone pray and felt like they had a better connection to God than you? Maybe their prayers seem more powerful and effective than yours. In this verse, the disciples saw Jesus praying and recognized there was something different and powerful about how He talked to the Father. Imagine them standing there, watching Him pray as was His custom. They were eyewitness to the relationship between Jesus and God the Father, and they recognized the power of His prayer.


 Who have you noticed praying that seems to have a better connection to God than you do? What is different about the way they pray?

As they noticed a difference in the way Jesus prayed, they were smart enough to ask Him about it. When you see a deficit in your own spiritual life, it is important to ask questions and seek ways to improve in that area. There is no one better to learn from than Jesus and as the disciples watched and listened to Him praying, they were moved to desire that same power for their own prayer lives.

No one on the planet could have taught them, or us, more effectively about prayer than Jesus. We need to follow the disciples' example and seek to learn all that we can about how to converse with the Father. Prayer is so simple that a child can do it but so powerful that even the most mature of believers will never master the practice. We are always in the transformation process in our faith, and we can always become more like Jesus.

 Why does it matter who you seek to learn from for your spiritual walk? What have you learned from this experience?

Notice the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. They didn't focus on theory; they focused on actually praying. Sometimes we get caught up in the "how to" of something instead of being focused on putting it into practice in our lives. Though it can be helpful to learn some new approach or technique of prayer. The key is to start praying and then pray some more.

 Application: How can you get started praying more rather than just thinking about it theoretically?


### 3. Model Prayer (Luke 11:2-4)

Although these verses are often referred to as the Lord's Prayer, they can also be labeled as the Model Prayer. Jesus gave a pattern of prayer that we can also put into practice in our lives. It is not a precise ritual or specific formula that must be followed. This model prayer is exactly that—a model to consider when you converse with God and want it to be effective and powerful. It is simple and brief because God is not impressed with the number of words we use but rather cares about the manner in which we approach Him and the posture of our hearts.

 Why is it important to consider Jesus's words as a model and not a formula or ritual?

Starting with how you address God is vital. Jesus used "Father," which implies intimacy and familiarity. It is a familial way of addressing God and reminds us of our role as His children. Some believers struggle to recognize who they're talking to. You do not always have to use "Father" in your address but can call out to Him as Almighty God, King of kings, heavenly Father, glorious Lord, or other monikers to remind you who you are talking to and the glory and honor due Him. Sometimes you may want to cry out to "God who heals" or "God who sees" depending on the situation you're facing.

Jesus's use of Father stood out because of its intimate nature and because it was unusual for the Jews to address God with that kind of personal relationship. It was a teaching moment for them and for us. When we talk to God, we can address Him in a variety of ways, but we should always approach Him with reverence. By adding in the phrase "in heaven," Jesus stressed the holiness and glory of God. When you pray, you are not talking to your neighbor or any other person. You are calling on Almighty God who has all power and majesty in the universe. That changes everything.

 Why does it matter how you address the Lord when you pray?

The rest of the Model Prayer gives different elements we can and should include in our prayers. **Praise and adoration of the Lord tops the list.** God is worthy of all the praise we can muster. We also recognize His will is what matters. We should invite Him to work in our lives in the way that He wills according to His infinite wisdom. Our desires need to take a back seat to what God wants because His will is perfect.

We can also bring our daily needs before the Lord. This includes our need for provisions, forgiveness, and strength to face temptations. These are not one-time requests. Daily bread represents our ongoing need to depend and rely on Him for even the most basic of needs. When we surrender our will to His and admit how much we need Him daily, we grow more like Jesus and pray as He did.



Application: An often used outline for prayer is ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. Have you ever practiced the ACTS outline for prayer? Consider assigning different people in the group one letter each of ACTS.

## Conclusion

Prayer is vital to believers and yet is a discipline and practice many struggle with. In Acts 1, the disciples were unified in prayer as they waited for the Holy Spirit. The church today can also be unified when we pray in one accord. We must take this call to prayer seriously and be devoted to it as the disciples were.

When you struggle with something, it's important to reach out for help. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray like He did. In giving them the Model Prayer as a guide, Jesus also helps us with this practice. This is not a formula or even a ritual but a guide for how to address the Lord.

As we pray, the key is to focus on who we are talking to so that our prayers reflect praise and adoration for Him. We also need to pray with humble, surrendered hearts that acknowledge our need for God on a daily basis. A wise Christ-follower will recognize how little power he or she has without God. God supplies our daily provisions, forgiveness, and the wisdom and strength to face temptations that come our way. Prayer is how we invite Him to work His will in our lives and how we admit our need for Him.

- ❓ Where do you struggle with prayer? How can you be encouraged towards further prayer from today's study?
- ❓ What will you do to promote unity in our group through prayer?
- ❓ Who are you praying will come to know the Lord? How might you seek to have another gospel conversation with them this week?

## Prayer of Response

*Praise the Lord for inviting you into His presence and giving you the gift of prayer. Confess any ways you have neglected this privilege and commit to developing a prayer life that is real, powerful, and effective.*

## Additional Resources

- *A Praying Life* by Paul Miller
- *Acts* by R.C. Sproul
- *Exalting Jesus in Luke* by Thabiti Anyabwile

For information on Missions, visit: [brentwood.church/missions](http://brentwood.church/missions)

# Disciples Multiplying Disciples



**Gospel Conversations** mean sharing the good news of Jesus with the lost and searching, trusting the Holy Spirit with the results.

**Groups** are ongoing biblical communities that grow, care, and equip.

**Going** means service to one's campus, neighbors, and the nations to imitate Jesus' love for believers and for those yet to believe.

**Gather** means believers assembling together (at least) weekly to worship God through singing, preaching, and encouraging one another to good works.

## Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

\*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC

## DxD This Week

### **Call to Action**

1. Before you go to bed, thank the Lord for ten things that happened that day.
2. Prayerfully consider joining a small group, which is the most effective step of personal discipleship and growth.



## For Next Week

### Session Title

- Pentecost

### Main Passages

- Acts 2:32-41

### Session Outline

1. Bold Preaching (Acts 2:32-33)
2. Call for Response (Acts 2:34-37)
3. Powerful Invitation (Acts 2:38-41)

### Memorize

*They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. - Acts 1:14*

# Historical Context of Acts

## Purpose

The book of Acts emphasizes the work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who devoted themselves to Jesus Christ, especially Paul as he led the Gentile missionary endeavor. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian church was built through the dynamic power of the Spirit working through chosen vessels. Another important concept is the radial spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to Judea, from Samaria and on to the rest of the world (1:8). Thus Christianity transformed from being a sect within Judaism to a world religion that eventually gained acceptance everywhere, even in the heart of the pagan Roman Empire: Rome itself.

## Author

The book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–29; 28:1–16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

## Setting

The date of composition of the book of Acts is to a large extent directly tied to the issue of authorship. A number of scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s (at the time of Paul’s imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (28:30–31). Although it is possible that Luke wrote at a later date, a time when Paul had been released, it is more plausible to think that he completed this book while Paul was still in prison. Otherwise he would have ended the book by telling about Paul’s release.

## Special Features

The book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30–63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

## Extended Commentary

### Acts 1:12-14

1:12–13 Lk 6:14–16 provides the same list of disciples. The lists in Mark and Matthew are similar, except for differences in the names of two disciples between Luke-Acts and Mark and Matthew. Several disciples had alternative names (Simon/Peter, Matthew/Levi; cp. v. 23), possibly accounting for differences between the lists. Simon the Zealot of Luke-Acts is probably Simon the Cananaean, and Judas the son of James in Luke-Acts may be Thaddaeus.

1:14 The women may have included the wives of the apostles. Jesus had six half-brothers according to Mk 6:3. Jesus appeared to James (1Co 15:7) and the others may have seen him as well.<sup>1</sup>

### Luke 11:1-4

11:1. Seeing Jesus at prayer made the disciples want to imitate him. They knew John's disciples had learned to pray from John. They wanted to learn to pray from Jesus. They saw that his actions each day came out of his prayer life with God. They desired that same dedicated prayer life.

11:2–4. So Jesus taught them a model prayer. This prayer contains the essence of all prayer. Any other prayer is simply an application and amplification of this prayer. The prayer begins with the direct address. It is aimed at the Father. This means prayer is an intimate talk between people who love and trust one another. Interestingly, Jesus did not surround the Father with all sorts of intimidating descriptive adjectives. The address does not try to flatter God, pass a theology exam, or gain God's favor. The address simply establishes contact between two persons who are committed to each other in close family ties. Those close ties are not between equals. As I pray I recognize the holy nature of the Father. I pray that the innate nature of the holy God be concretely realized in our world. This realization or manifestation of God's holy nature may come in two ways. God may act in such a way that he shows the world his holy nature. People may respond to God in awe and reverence. The prayer may contain both elements, asking God to act so people will respond. That response is partial now but will one day be complete when the kingdom comes. So the prayer for God to establish his kingdom on earth in some ways duplicates the call of his holiness to be made known. In Jesus and his preaching, the kingdom has been seen on earth. We pray that the day will soon come when the kingdom will be seen in its fullness and its permanence. Prayer is not just concerned with the large picture of recognizing God and establishing his kingdom. Prayer is also individual and personal, asking for the most basic necessities. Such prayer recognizes that we cannot provide these ourselves but are dependent on the Father for all we have. Even the personal cry for food is issued in the plural. Prayer never becomes individualistic and selfish. The most intimate requests are made as part of the worshiping community of God's people. We pray not just for ourselves but for all God's people. Finally, prayer deals with anything that might separate us from God. We depend on God to take away our sins. In so doing, we know that forgiveness is not simply an activity of God. We are also responsible to forgive those who treat us wrong. We should not expect God's loving action if we are not willing to practice the same kind of love toward others. This does not turn prayer and forgiveness into a business transaction in which I forgive in order to be forgiven or one in which

God can forgive only after I forgive. Rather, I pray that God will truly transform my nature so that I become like him. I pray that my focus will be on godliness and not on worldliness. Prayer is not simply concerned with past sins and restoration of relationship with the Father. Prayer also seeks to maintain this relationship as a permanent experience. To do so, prayer deals with everything that would lead us to sin. We ask God to direct our lives in such a way that they will not come near the people and powers that would tempt us away from God and toward temptation. Only as God leads us away from temptation can the intimate Father-child relationship be maintained.<sup>2</sup>

## References

1. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
2. Kenneth Gangel, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998).

## Author Bio

### Paul Miller (A Praying Life)

Paul E. Miller is executive director of seeJesus, the global discipling mission he founded in 1999 to help Christians and non-Christians alike “see Jesus.” Today, seeJesus works in over 30 countries and has books and interactive Bible study materials translated into at least a dozen languages.

### R.C. Sproul (Acts)

R.C. Sproul (1939–2017) was founder of Ligonier Ministries in Orlando, Fla. He was also copastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel, first president of Reformation Bible College, and executive editor of *Tabletalk* magazine. His radio program, *Renewing Your Mind*, is still broadcast daily on hundreds of radio stations around the world and can also be heard online.

### Thabiti Anyabwile (Exalting Jesus in Acts)

Thabiti M. Anyabwile (MS, North Carolina State University) serves as a pastor at Anacostia River Church in Washington, DC, and is the author of numerous books. He serves as a council member of the Gospel Coalition, is a lead writer for 9Marks Ministries, and regularly blogs at *The Front Porch* and *Pure Church*. He and his wife, Kristie, have three children.

### Kenneth Gangel (Acts)

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He’s written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.