

Session 1

PRAY

Acts 4:23-31; Philippians 4:6-7

Memory Verse

When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

– ACTS 4:31, CSB




Pray

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The early church set an example Christians are wise to follow today. When tough times came their way, they gathered and prayed with faith, believing their prayers could bring about powerful results. Prayer should be our first response in good times and difficult days.

Most people have someone they turn to when something significant happens in life. We may even have different people we turn to depending on whether the circumstance is good or bad. Think about who you like to celebrate with. Now, who do you call when you are frustrated or need advice on parenting, career choices, financial issues, health, or a fitness question? You likely have different people that you reach out to depending on the topic.

But how quickly do you turn to the Lord in these moments? Do you tend to take your questions, frustrations, and challenges to every person on your list before you take it to God? Think about how much trouble or anxiety we could avoid if we developed the habit of turning to God in prayer before anything else.

 Who is your first call when you are frustrated or need advice?

 What stops you from taking your concerns to the Lord first in these moments?

Session Summary

The church in Acts gave examples we should follow in our own lives and churches today. Though they faced difficulties and persecution, they prioritized gathering in prayer. They devoted themselves to the Lord in unity and faith.

Throughout Scripture, we are reminded that prayer is our best resource in times of need. There are many powerful prayers recorded in the Bible as well as instruction on how to pray. Today, we will consider one example of dependency in prayer from the early church as well as Paul's instruction on prayer to a specific church.

1. Powerful Prayer (Acts 4:23-28)

As they lived out their faith in practical ways, the early church faced persecution and attack. Peter and John were taken into custody because of their ministry of preaching and healing in Jesus's name. In verse 23, they returned to their church family after being released and reported how God had used the persecution against them for His glory. It is important to recognize they did not gather and whine about how hard it was to be followers of Jesus. They did not complain about being arrested or mistreated. Instead, they celebrated the good things God was doing in their lives.

Hearing Peter and John's report of their experiences led to a time of prayer. This first Christian community responded just as we should: in good times or bad, the early church was dependent in prayer.



What most often moves you to prayer?

Verse 24 says they raised their voices together in prayer to the Lord. The words used to describe this time indicated the people were all in agreement. Though we don't know exactly what this time looked like and the way the people prayed together, they were unified in dependency on and praise of the Lord.

The people acknowledged God as their Master, who was in control of all they faced and experienced. Acknowledging who we are praying to gives us confidence because it reminds us that God is in control. No situation is hopeless, and we are not helpless because the Sovereign God of the universe holds everything in the palms of His hands.

? How does it strengthen your prayers to remember the unchanging attributes and character of God as you call to Him?

They first acknowledged who they appealed to, then their prayer moved to quoting Scripture and applying God's Word to their current circumstances. David's words from the Psalms were a reminder that followers of Jesus should expect these types of persecution and need not be deterred by them. Praying Scripture also framed their circumstances in light of God's Word so they could keep proper perspective. Praying God's Word is empowering as we call on the promises of God and live considering what we know to be true, no matter our circumstances.

? Application: How might you make a practice of praying the Bible back to God? Why is this good and appropriate to do?

2. Answered Prayer (Acts 4:29-31)

When making their requests, these believers did not ask God to take away their difficulties and persecution. Instead, they asked for boldness to keep spreading the gospel. Not only did they not ask to avoid difficulty, but the renewed boldness they sought would also inevitably lead to more confrontation and persecution. It would have been understandable for this group to seek relief from persecution, but they were far more concerned with advancing the gospel than protecting themselves.

? Put yourself in the place of these early believers. What would you have asked God for in this moment? How did their prayers reveal their ultimate priority?

In keeping with an attitude of prayer, these believers asked God to stretch out His hand. This was an acknowledgement that it was only by God's work that true change and gospel advance would take place. This was a beautiful example of humility that all followers of Christ should exude. The early church took no credit for the great things done among them but humbly implored God to keep doing the work and vowed to keep giving Him the glory.

? Why is humility key to being used by God? What makes it tempting to move away from humility when God is working among us?

In response to their prayers, there was a violent shaking, as if it was caused by an earthquake. This was tangible evidence of God's presence and power and His hearing the believers' prayers. The text then says the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit, but experience was not a repetition of Pentecost. The believers received a fresh infusion of the Spirit's power and inspiration in answer to their prayer. By the Spirit's power, they began to speak God's message with boldness. God gave them exactly what they had requested in verse 29.

In these events we see that those empowered by the Spirit of God proclaim the truth about God and give glory to God. Their motivation originates from the indwelling Holy Spirit's power and presence. Christians overflowing with the Holy Spirit share the gospel. In fact, one filled with the Spirit declares the gospel boldly. Isn't that what we want? Courage? Boldness? To live in obedience to Christ? Dependent prayer fosters such a transformation.

? Application: Where do you need Holy Spirit-inspired boldness today? How will you seek this from the Lord in prayer?

3. Practical Prayer (Philippians 4:6-7)

The apostle Paul wrote some of the most practical instruction in Scripture. In Philippians, he gave instructions relating to prayer that we can use in our lives as we are committed to intentional growth in our prayer lives. The way Paul addressed the subject gives us helpful guidance for prayer.

Note that these words were phrased as a command, not a suggestion. Believers need to be serious about our prayer lives. We are not to be anxious about anything. This is certainly easier said than done. Yet, through ongoing dependence on the Father, it is possible to live this way. Paul said we are not to be anxious but to pray about everything. Prayer is the key to living without anxiety. When we pray about our circumstances, we can live without the burdens of stress and anxiety. Prayer reminds us who is in control. Anxiety seeks to take control for us while prayer joyfully relinquishes control to God.

? How quickly do you submit the things that make you anxious before the Lord?

Paul further said we are to pray about everything. There is no reason to compartmentalize our lives into things we pray about and things we deal with on our own. Too many people limit their prayers to certain topics and issues instead of taking everything to the Lord. We can be encouraged that God cares about every single aspect of our lives, which means we can pray about every thing, not just some things.

? What are the areas of your life you tend to compartmentalize or leave out of prayer? How can you bring those things before the Lord today?

As we pray, God invites us to ask Him. We are to make our requests known and leave them with Him. Some might argue that God already knows what we need, so there is no need to pray. Yes, He does know our every need, but He calls us to bring these things before Him regularly. And we are called to approach Him with thanksgiving. Our gratitude toward the Lord is key because it not only acknowledges who we are talking to, but it also expresses our thanks for His ongoing activity, protection, and provision. Praying with thanksgiving keeps us from a self-centered perspective on prayer.

Paul's instructions in these verses also come with a promise. When we learn to pray this way, the peace of God that passes understanding will guard our hearts and minds. God's peace rises above all circumstances and depends on nothing but the Lord. This peace goes beyond human understanding and guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.




Application: How could your prayer life change based on this passage?

Conclusion

God's people should be committed to prayer as seen in the example of the early church. Too many of us pray in ways that don't reflect who we are talking to or pray without the belief that our prayers make any difference. The early believers prayed in one accord and with great faith that God would respond. He did and they received the boldness they prayed for as the Holy Spirit filled each person.

Our world needs Christians to develop powerful prayer lives focused on spreading the gospel with boldness over everything else. We should pray about everything instead of trying to control our lives by constant worry and self-effort. When we learn to take our requests and concerns to the Lord in attitudes of gratitude, we are promised spiritual protection and peace that is only found in Jesus.

 Based on today's study, what is one change you will seek to make in your habits of prayer?

 Who can you be praying for that is far from Christ?

Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



FOR NEXT WEEK

Preach

Main Passages

- Acts 2:14-36; Romans 10:14-15

Session Outline

1. Preaching Is Necessary (Romans 10:14-15)
2. Bold Proclamation (Acts 2:14-21)
3. Preaching Jesus (Acts 2:22-36)

Memorize

When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

- Acts 4:31, CSB

Prayer Prompts: Reflect on these thoughts in your prayer time.

- What are some specific areas of your life that you need to bring to God, praying about everything and not just some things?
- What is something in your community that you can pray about, giving God control over?
- What can you thank God for in your prayer time?