




THE COMMUNITY

A Powerful Prayer | PRAYER

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 4:23-37

Prayer is one of the hardest disciplines in the Christian life – unless you are scared and desperate for help. Then, it is the easiest thing in the world. Peter and John have just been through the whirlwind. They’ve been arrested, jailed and threatened, but they stood strong. The Holy Spirit gave them courage to stand before the religious rulers and testify of His grace. They were bold witnesses for Christ. In verse 23, they are released from prison and returned to the fellowship of believers where they report all that has happened. Immediately, they join their voices in prayer to God. Their hearts are full of thanks for God’s deliverance, and they are earnest in their hope for His continued grace.

It’s clear from the text of their prayer that they knew that God could do anything and that, in fact, nothing happens outside of His sovereign will. They begin by asserting that He is the God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. Surely, nothing is too difficult for Him.

As they pray, they quote Psalm 2, the first Psalm about the Messiah. Psalm 2 neatly divides into four three-verse scenes. They quote the first scene in which the narrator asks why the world rails against God, and His Messiah. (The word Messiah literally means, “Anointed One.”) Their rage is futile. God’s power is absolute.

Scene two is in heaven, where God is on His throne. Their threats against Him are not even sufficient to rouse Him from His chair. Rather, He laughs at the absurdity, and warns them that the Messiah King is reigning.

Scene three is a picture of the coronation of that King, where God the Father gives to Christ the nations over which He is to rule. He has total authority and sovereign power. Nothing can hinder Him.

In the final scene, the narrator returns and implores the nations to stop their rebellion, and pay homage to the King. “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way.” He will destroy the rebels, but offer safety to all who come to Him.

That is the understanding the believers had of God as they prayed to Him. Because of that, they pray with confidence that He can, and will, intervene on their behalf, as they preach the gospel. After praising God for His power, they make two requests.

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What’s the Big Idea?

In the crucible of radical and risky ministry, prayer becomes spontaneous, dynamic and joyful. The key to experiencing great prayer is committing great acts of faith.

What’s the Problem?

When we aren’t engaged in the radical edge of our faith, prayer deteriorates into a boring monotonous discipline.

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First, in verse 29, they ask that they might be able to speak with great boldness in the face of the threats against them. Second, in the next verse they ask God to perform miraculous signs and wonders in the name of Jesus.

In verse 31, we see the answer to both of these prayers. First, the building shakes – clearly a supernatural response from God and an answer to their second prayer. Following that, they speak the word of God boldly, just as they had requested. As we've seen throughout Acts, they were able to speak boldly because they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Last, we see a demonstration of uncommon unity and oneness among the believers. This too is a natural outworking of radical and risky ministry and fervent prayer.

Hopefully your group is beginning to see the picture Luke is painting. In scene after scene there is great power, bold evangelism, fervent prayer and sincere affection. Our hope as you look at this each week is that it will whet your group's appetite to see the same dynamics at work on your campus and in your ministry. Do your best to bring this to life and invite them to daydream about what this could look like at your school.

What's Our Response?

Evaluate the sorts of things you pray about. Determine to undertake efforts for which you will be desperate for God's assistance. Pray in faith that He will meet you there.

Think about how to escalate the intensity and participation of group prayer on your campus. How can you fuel what is happening, or start something if it does not exist?

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What Are the Questions?

Acts 4:23-37

Launch

Let's play a word association game. What are the first three adjective that come to mind when I say, "Prayer Meeting." Why do you think those terms came to mind?

Explore

Read Acts 4:23-31.

1. What has been happening in Acts 4 prior to these verses?

2. How do you think Peter and John were feeling? How were the rest of the believers feeling as they waited for their release from prison?

3. When Peter and John were released, they went back and reported all that had happened. Luke says that in response, they raised their voices in prayer. This doesn't sound like a boring prayer meeting they went to because it was expected of them, but rather it seems that they couldn't help but pray. What is different here from our common experience?

The prayer contains a quote from Psalm 2. Read Psalm 2.

4. How does this Psalm relate to their current situation?

5. What are some of the thoughts it expresses concerning Jesus.

6. What assurances and hope would this Psalm provide the believers?

7. Why was that appropriate to pray back to God?

8. In addition to praising God for His power, they make two requests. What are they?

9. How does God answer them?

10. These men and woman were obviously already indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit. What is in view when it says that they were "filled" with the Holy Spirit?

11. How is radical evangelism connected to powerful, passionate prayer? Can they be separated?

Read Acts 4:32-37.

12. The next thing Luke records is the unity of the believers. How does this relate to the prayer and its result?

13. Why do you think they were so generous with each other?

Apply

14. When has prayer been easiest and most natural for you?

15. Why do you think we find prayer so difficult?

16. Is there currently a time when believers gather to pray for the campus? If there is, what do you see that is currently lacking in this time – in contrast to what you observe in this passage?

17. In what way can you contribute to bringing about this kind of prayer on campus?

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. Peter and John have been arrested for preaching the gospel. Filled with the Spirit, they were bold and didn't back down. They were then threatened and released.
2. Peter and John may have felt exhilarated, scared, and in awe. The believers were likely very scared as they awaited the fate of their leaders.
3. They were at a place where they were desperate for God's help. That turns prayer from a monotony into the only thing that can satisfy the soul. Our problem is that we often don't attempt great things, or take great risks, so we don't need great answers to prayer. A radical life of faith is the cure for boring prayer.
4. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?" Psalm 2 is about the certainty that Messiah will reign victoriously despite the world's rebellion against Him.
5. Jesus is the sovereign Messiah and King who rules the nations.
6. They would gain assurance from God's great power, sovereignty, and the certain success of Messiah's kingdom.
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. In verse 29, they pray that they could speak with great boldness. In verse 30, they pray God would perform miraculous signs and wonders in Jesus' name.
9. The building shakes in response to their prayer for a miracle. They are filled with the Spirit and enabled to speak with boldness.
10. Apparently, this is a special empowerment, which sometimes God provides people.
11. The two are joined together – passionate prayer does not take place without courageous evangelism and ministry.
12. The Spirit, besides empowering believers to share the gospel, also brings unity. It's also a natural result of attempting great things together and succeeding despite great trials.
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. usually when life has been hard and we are aware of our need.
15. Because we are rarely aware of our deep need. Arrogance and choosing the easy path contributes to this.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. Allow the group to discuss. Decide to make radical decisions to walk by faith and do things that will fail miserably if God doesn't intervene. Take steps to see that uncommon prayer is happening on your campus.

Memorize

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7



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