

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the message today, God is going to teach us some important truths about prayer. My prayer as we talk about prayer, is that you will be moved to pray more often and with more confidence.

Imagine that the mayor of Omaha, or the chief of police, or the president of the U.S. gave you his private cell number, and said, “You give me a call *any* time and I promise I will take care of you.” You’ve got something even better. The God of the universe invites you in Psalm 50:15: “Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” And Jesus said, And Jesus said this: (John 14:13-14) “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

When the almighty God gives you an open line direct to his throne room, wouldn’t we be foolish not to use it?

Yet some people hesitate to pray or even feel uncomfortable praying, because they’re not sure they’re doing it right!

So let’s take a look at a section of Scripture where we see a sample prayer that was spoken by the early believers. How can we be sure that they prayed “right?” Why do we think we might learn from this prayer? Here’s why: Immediately after they said this prayer, the house they were in shook, and God *immediately* answered the prayer! That sounds like a prayer worth studying.

I want to start by reading the whole account to you so you get the whole picture, then we’ll take it a part and study it in more detail.

Acts 4:23-31 On their release [Back story: Peter and John, when entering the temple area, were confronted by a beggar... a man in his 40’s who was crippled from birth. Rather than giving the man some money for food, Peter looked the man in the eye and said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” The man’s legs instantly became strong and he stood up and walked... and jumped and praised God for this healing in the name of Jesus. This miracle caused no small commotion, and a large crowd quickly gathered. Peter took the opportunity to boldly proclaim the good news about Jesus. It’s a great story and a great sermon of Peter. Read about it in Acts 3. When the priests and Sadducees heard their preaching in the temple area, they had the temple guard arrest them. They were held overnight in prison, and the next day put on trial. They were commanded not to preach about Jesus and more, but Peter and John openly declared that they would continue, for they had to obey God rather than men. The leaders couldn’t agree on a punishment since the people were on the side of Peter and John, and finally they let them go.] **Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:**
“ ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

26 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Okay, let’s take a closer look now. What does God teach us about prayer here? After walking away from a potentially very bad situation... after receiving direct threats about future proclamation of Christ... knowing things would likely get worse from here on out for the believers... what do they prayer for? And what does this teach us about prayer in our time of trouble? There are 5 “s” words I’d like you to remember so you can model your prayer after theirs:

1. **Solidarity.** The believers prayed together, didn’t they? Upon being released, Peter and John didn’t quietly slink home, keep the whole matter quiet, embarrassed about having been arrested. No, they were committed to fellowship. There was a solidarity among the belieers. They weren’t too busy or ashamed to gather and pray together about this.

When you are persecuted, or face trouble of any kind, what do you do? Where do you turn? Solidarity. Turn to your brothers and sisters in Christ! Forget about putting on a front of “everything is okay.” Be open and transparent with what’s happening and how it’s affecting you. Share, and be encouraged and supported by fellow believers. That’s why Jesus made us one family.

I don’t believe we do this nearly often enough. We want people to believe we’re strong, we’re in control, we’ve got it all together. Praying together means I need help. Well, truth is, you do! Open up and pray with one another for one another. What’s the first thing we learn about prayer? Solidarity. It’s the reason Jesus taught us to pray, “OUR Father” not “MY Father.”

2. **Submit.** Look how they address God in prayer: “Sovereign Lord.” This is one word in Greek: “Despotes.” Our English word “Despot” comes from this. It is one who is absolute master. That’s not a good thing if you’re talking about a sinful human being... if they become absolute master, things don’t go well, at least not for long. Someone once said, “The most effective form of government is an absolute dictatorship... as long as I’m the dictator.” But the truth is, the best form of government in the universe is a dictatorship if that dictator is all loving and all merciful... and he is... and it’s our God. They acknowledged in their prayer: **“you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.”** In your prayers, then, submit to God. Recognize his absolute authority and control over your life, circumstances and specific situations.
3. **Scripture.** And this one is really important. Maybe in your mind, Scripture and prayer are two separate things, but the early believers knew that without Scripture and a knowledge of God, there cannot be true prayer.

- a. *Believing in the inspiration of Scripture.* First, they knew and believed the Scriptures are inspired by God: **“You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David.”** They were confident that the Scriptures were God’s Word, not man’s word... that they were therefore true in every aspect.

Imagine if you weren’t confident that the Bible reveals the true God, and his true anger over sin, and his true solution for it in Christ Jesus. You couldn’t know your standing with him, and you wouldn’t be able to pray with any confidence whatsoever. But the Holy Spirit did give the words to the writers, and it is true, and so we do know our standing with God!

- b. *Applying Scripture to their situation.* What else about Scriptures? Knowing their situation, they recalled Scripture that addressed this situation. When they remembered it, they quoted it! **“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.”** They knew God had foretold there would be times like this. It was in Psalm 2:1-2. This Scripture dealt with their exact situation.

This is important! Before you bring your request God, search Scripture. Remember Scripture. What Scripture stories, passages, truths or promises relate to what I’m going through and what I’m about to pray about? Remembering God’s Word guides your prayer and may well answer your prayer. So apply Scriptures to your situation.

- c. *They prayed seeing fulfillment of Scripture in Jesus.* **“Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”** In thinking of Scripture, they also looked for Jesus in Scripture! They knew that finally, every situation that is important and that really matters is going to be all about Jesus.
- d. See how important Scripture was to prayer? What does this tell you? For your prayers to be properly focused, on topic, from a proper heart, according to the will of God... we must know Scriptures. We must study, memorize, and meditate on Scripture. It is not enough to get an hour on a Sunday morning and go home. We must be in Scripture daily, or we will not know how to pray!

4. **Steadfastness.** Now that they 1) were together and 2) remembered they were addressing the absolute ruler of all and 3) remembered Scriptures that pertained to their situation... now they were ready to make their request to God. Their prayer? Steadfastness. **“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”**

They prayed for boldness for the name of Jesus! ...to remain steadfast in him, and continue the work he had given them to do... to not back down from the gospel ministry he had entrusted to them. Note, they didn’t pray for success. Not a stop to persecution. Not for peace. Not even that God would change the hearts of their oppressors. (Not that that would have been wrong.) They prayed for something they knew to be the will of God.

They prayed that they may continue to speak the word with boldness. This was the will of God, and they knew that the temptation was to not do what God wanted because of fear. They prayed that they might be steadfast.

5. **SPIRIT:** This is the cool part. Did God hear their prayer? Did he answer their prayer? There can be no question! **“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”** God IMMEDIATELY answered their God-pleasing prayer! Filled with Spirit. Spoke boldly! What they asked for, we immediately given!

Now let me ask you... how do your prayers compare to their prayer? Did anything we talk about today make you feel guilty as you compared their prayer to your prayers? What do you have to repent of? Being a loner when it comes to your problems and prayer life? Not submitting to God? Forgetting about Scripture and how it applies to your daily life and how it is all about Jesus? Not seeing steadfastness as a primary prayer? Repent and turn to Jesus and receive is full and free forgiveness. It's the whole reason he went to the cross. He paid you sin debt in full!

Now, starting today, practice patterning your prayers after the one we heard today! Remember: Solidarity. Submit. Scriptures. Steadfastness. Spirit. I'm not suggesting that if your prayers have been lacking in any of these they have been ineffectual! No, God in his mercy covers our imperfect prayers with the blood of Christ and joyfully hears and answers them. But we can learn to pray better and we better exercise our faith when we do. To that end, intentionally pray as did the believers in the reading today. Pray frequently pray. Pray confidently. Pray mindful of Scriptures! Amen.