



Silverdale Baptist

REACH ~ HOW? THROUGH FERVENT PRAYER ~ 10/15-16/2022 ~ ACTS 4:21-31

Big Idea

How do we reach the lost? By fervent prayer.

Getting Started

What was the last situation that led you to fervent prayer?

Why was that situation different from everyday situations around us that need prayer?

Prayer changes the world. We often get serious about prayer in a crisis situation, like cancer in our family or a financial challenge. But should it take a new crisis to motivate us to fervent prayer? We are surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people who do not know Jesus. The lostness of our world should motivate us to earnest prayer.

“The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from prayer. Our enemy fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray. Prayer turns ordinary mortals into men of power. It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God. There is no power like that of prevailing prayer.” –(Samuel Chadwick)

Learn

When will we pray?

3 Key motivations for prayer:

1. We will pray when we face overwhelming circumstances.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 4:1-18

Ask someone to summarize the events of this passage.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 4:17-22

What happened to Peter and John?

What are the threats against them?

How did Peter and John respond to the religious leaders' threats?

How do we respond to overwhelming circumstances? First, we should be responding in prayer because our self-sufficiency is only a delusion.

2. When we know God's in control.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 4:23-31

How did the church body respond to the leader's threats?

In their prayer, how is God described?

God is over creation – vs. 26

God is over history – vs. 27-28

3. When we know God will empower us.

In verses 29-30, what exactly are they asking God for?

How did God answer?

Apply

What significant issues in your life are pushing you to pray?

How have you seen God work in response to prayer in the past?

What specifically will you pray for this week?

Pray

Father, we are facing overwhelming circumstances, and we know You are in control. Teach us to trust You and to expect You to respond. Empower us to share the good news with others. In Jesus' name, we ask, amen,

Dig Deeper

Acts 4:15-31

Their deliberation (vv. 15–18). The council did not seek for truth, but rather sought for some way to avoid the truth! Had they honestly considered the evidence and meekly listened to the message, they might have been saved, but their pride and hardness of heart stood in the way. Some of the chief priests and elders had experienced a similar dilemma during Passover when they had tried to trap Jesus in the temple (Matt. 21:23–27). Some people never learn! But their response is proof that miracles alone can never convict or convert the lost sinner. Only the Word of God can do that (see John 11:45–53; Acts 14:1–20).

Their conclusion. They wanted to “let the thing die a natural death.” This meant threatening the Apostles and forbidding them to teach and preach in the name of Jesus. This official sentence shows how much the enemy fears the witness of the church, for Satan has been trying to silence God’s people from the very beginning. Sad to say, he has succeeded with far too many Christians, the “silent witnesses” of the church. Even the existential philosopher Albert Camus said, “What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak out, loud and clear ... in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt, could arise in the heart of the simplest man.”

The council did not want the Gospel message to spread, and yet that is exactly what happened! From 120 praying men and women in Acts 1, the church increased to more than 3,000 on the Day of Pentecost; and now there were more than 5,000 disciples in the fellowship. In the days that followed, “believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14; and see 6:1, 7). Satan’s attempts to silence the church only led to a stronger witness for the Lord.

The failure of the council (vv. 19–22). This was evident when Peter refused to be intimidated by their threats. All of us need to follow Peter’s example and make our decisions on the basis of “Is it right?” and not “Is it popular?” or “Is it safe?” However, we must be sure that we have the clear teaching of the Word of God on our side before we take a stand against the authority of the government. Peter knew what the Lord had commanded the believers to do (Acts 1:8), and he was going to obey Him at any cost.

It is popular today to promote various causes by defying the government, disobeying the law, and defending these actions on the basis of conscience. Since even some Christians are involved in this approach to social action, it is important to understand the kind of “civil disobedience” practiced by people in the Bible. Peter and John are not the only ones who disobeyed the authorities in order to serve God. A list of “dedicated conscientious objectors” would include, among others: the Jewish midwives (Ex. 1), Moses’ parents (Heb. 11:23), Daniel (Dan. 1; 6), and the three Hebrew children (Dan. 3). When you examine the records, you discover the biblical principles by which they operated, principles that are not always followed today.

To begin with, each of these “objectors” had a message from God that could not be questioned. The midwives and Moses’ parents knew that it was wrong to murder the babies. Daniel and his friends, and the three Hebrew men, knew that it was wrong to eat food offered to idols or to bow down to idols in worship. Peter and John knew that they were under orders from their Master to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and that it would be wrong to obey the Sanhedrin. All of these people were faithfully obeying a clear word from God and not just following some selfish personal whim of their own.

Second, their convictions touched every area of their lives. In other words, they did everything “with conscience toward God” (1 Peter 2:19) because they belonged to God. The university student today whose conscience permits him to cheat on exams or drive while drunk, but not register for military service, does not convince me that he is really cultivating a healthy conscience. When a person’s *total*

life is under the direction of a godly conscience, then I find it easier to have confidence in his unpopular decisions.

Note also that our examples from the Bible acted with respect and courtesy, even when they defied the law. It is possible for Christians to respect authority and at the same time disobey the authorities (see Rom. 13; Titus 3:1–2; 1 Peter 2:13–25). Daniel tried to avoid getting his guard into trouble, and the Apostles used their arrests as opportunities for witness. This is quite a contrast to some of the modern “Christian objectors” who seem to major on denunciation and accusation rather than loving witness.

Of course, the greatest example of unjust suffering is that of Jesus Christ, and we must imitate Him (see 1 Peter 2:13–25). Jesus teaches us that righteous protest against injustice always involves sacrifice and suffering, and must be motivated by love. God’s people must be careful not to clothe their prejudice in the garments of “righteous indignation” and pass themselves off as courageous soldiers of conscience. We must examine our own hearts honestly to make certain we are not conducting a “holy war” just to satisfy inner frustrations.

Because they had no real case to offer, the council could only threaten the men and let them go. After all, when you have a living miracle before you, as well as an approving public around you, you must be careful what you do!

The Church: Calling on His Name (Acts 4:23–31)

The greatest concentration of power in Jerusalem that day was in the prayer meeting that followed the trial. This is one of the truly great prayers recorded in the Bible, and it is a good example for us to follow.

To begin with, it was a prayer that was born out of witness and service for the Lord. Peter and John had just come in “from the trenches,” and the church met to pray in order to defeat the enemy. Too often today, believers gather for prayer as though attending a concert or a party. There is little sense of urgency and danger because most of us are comfortable in our Christian walk. If more of God’s people were witnessing for Christ in daily life, there would be more urgency and blessing when the church meets for prayer.

It was a united prayer meeting as they “lifted up their voice to God with one accord” (Acts 4:24; see 1:14). The people were of one heart and mind, and God was pleased to answer their requests. Division in the church always hinders prayer and robs the church of spiritual power.

Their praying was based solidly on the Word of God, in this case, Psalm 2. The Word of God and prayer must always go together (John 15:7). In His Word, God speaks to us and tells us what He wants to do. In prayer, we speak to Him and make ourselves available to accomplish His will. True prayer is not telling God what to do, but asking God to do His will in us and through us (1 John 5:14–15). It means getting God’s will done on earth, not man’s will done in heaven.

They did not pray to have their circumstances changed or their enemies put out of office. Rather, they asked God to empower them to make the best use of their circumstances and to accomplish what He had already determined (Acts 4:28). This was not “fatalism” but faith in the Lord of history who has a perfect plan and is always victorious. They asked for divine enablement, not escape; and God gave them the power that they needed.

“Do not pray for easy lives,” wrote Phillips Brooks. “Pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks.” That is the way the early Christians prayed, and that is the way God’s people should pray today.

They addressed God as “Sovereign Lord,” the God who is in control of all things. The Greek word gives us our English word *despot*, a ruler who exercises absolute power, either benevolently or abusively.

Simeon used this same title when he prayed in the temple (Luke 2:29). It is good to know the Sovereign Lord when you are experiencing persecution.

They also approached Him as the Creator, for, after all, if your Father is “Lord of heaven and earth,” what have you to fear? (see Matt. 11:25–30) Nehemiah approached God on this same basis (Neh. 9:6), and so did the psalmist (see Ps. 145) and the Prophet Isaiah (Isa. 42). Years later, when he wrote his first epistle, Peter encouraged suffering saints to yield themselves to the faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19).

Psalm 2 describes the revolt of the nations against the Lord and His Christ. The psalm originally grew out of the crowning of a new king in Israel, perhaps David; but its ultimate message points to the King of kings, Jesus Christ. Whenever a new king was enthroned, the vassal rulers around were required to come and submit to him; but some of them refused to do this. God only laughed at their revolt, for He knew that they could never stand up against His King.

The early believers applied the message of this psalm to their own situation and identified their adversaries as Herod, Pilate, the Romans, and the Jews. These enemies had “ganged up” against Jesus Christ and even crucified Him, yet God raised Him from the dead and enthroned Him in heaven. All of this was a part of God’s perfect plan (see Acts 2:23; 3:18), so there was no need to fear.

The early church strongly believed in God’s sovereignty and His perfect plan for His people. But note that they did not permit their faith in divine sovereignty to destroy human responsibility, for they were faithful to witness and pray. It is when God’s people get out of balance and overemphasize either sovereignty or responsibility that the church loses power. Again, we are reminded of Augustine’s wise words, “Pray as though everything depends on God, and work as though everything depended on you.” Faith in a sovereign Lord is a tremendous encouragement for God’s people to keep serving the Lord when the going is difficult.

They did not ask for protection; they asked for power. They did not ask for fire from heaven to destroy the enemy (see Luke 9:51–56), but for power from heaven to preach the Word and heal the sick (see Matt. 5:10–12, 43–48). Their great desire was for boldness in the face of opposition (see Acts 4:17). The emphasis is on the hand of God at work in the life of the church (Acts 4:28, 30), not the hand of man at work for God. Believing prayer releases God’s power and enables God’s hand to move (Isa. 50:2; 64:1–8).

Finally, note that they wanted to glorify God’s Child (Servant) Jesus Christ (Acts 4:27, 30). It was His name that gave them power to minister the Word and to perform miracles, and His name alone deserved the glory. The glory of God, not the needs of men, is the highest purpose of answered prayer.

God’s answer was to shake the place where they were meeting and to fill the people once again with the Spirit of God (Acts 4:31). This gave them the boldness that they needed to continue to serve God in spite of official opposition. This was not a “second Pentecost” because there cannot be another Pentecost any more than there can be another Calvary. It was a new filling of the Spirit to equip the believers to serve the Lord and minister to the people.¹

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [*The Bible Exposition Commentary*](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 417–419.