

Week 5 Summer Series: In His Footsteps/ Praying Strategically Pt 2

August 3, 2025

Opening Monologue

We are in a Summer Sermon Series titled In His Footsteps, where we're exploring the Biblical truth of how the Early Church and Christians followed the teachings of Jesus Christ. They didn't just talk about what Jesus taught—they lived it out.

This Sunday, we dive into Part 2 of Praying Strategically. If you missed Part 1, you can check it out here:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/W4HB3unIEjg?si=BfH7DG5mRzrJL29q>

In the Gospels, we see a vital theme about Jesus that we must note, understand, and incorporate into our Christian lives: "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (Luke 5:16b) We read about Jesus slipping away in the early morning hours to pray. Why did He do this? To escape the noise, distractions, and chaos of this world—and to be empowered for life and ministry. This is what we call praying strategically, something we could all likely be better at, if we're honest with ourselves.

Strategic prayer isn't a one-and-done moment. It's a continuous practice, day after day, until we receive the breakthrough we seek. This is deeply rooted in God's Word, which tells us, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Praying continually, praying with power, and praying strategically—these are the topics we'll explore this week. Join us as we press into God's rich Word to empower our Christian lives.

"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant

Jesus.” (Acts 4:29-30)

Blessings in Christ!

Rev. Brad Standfest

To Listen to this week’s Sermon: “Week 5 Sermon Series: In His Footsteps/Praying Strategically Pt 2.” Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Texts

Luke 5:15-16 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%205%3A15-16&version=NIV>

Mark 8:22-25 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%208%3A22-25&version=NIV>

Ephesians 6:18 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%206%3A18&version=NIV>

Jude 1:20 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jude%201%3A20&version=NIV>

Hebrews 4:16 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%204%3A16&version=NIV>

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%205%3A16-18%20&version=NIV>

Colossians 4:2 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%204%3A2%20&version=NIV>

Romans 12:12 (ESV)
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%2012%3A12%20&version=ESV>

Acts 4:23-31
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%204%3A23-31%20&version=NIV>

Thoughts on Praying Strategically

Praying strategically by withdrawing from the chaos, distractions, and noise of the world, as Jesus modeled in the Gospels, empowers our prayer life by fostering a deeper connection with God, aligning our hearts with His will, and renewing our spiritual strength. Below is a biblical explanation rooted in Scripture, connecting Jesus' example to the empowerment of our prayer life.

Biblical Explanation: Strategic Prayer and Empowerment

In the Gospels, Jesus frequently withdrew to solitary places to pray, demonstrating the importance of stepping away from the world's chaos, distractions, and noise to commune with the Father. Luke 5:16 (NIV) states, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." This intentional practice was not an escape from responsibility but a strategic act to align Himself with God's purposes, gain spiritual clarity, and draw strength for His mission. By following this example, we can empower our prayer lives in the following ways, grounded in biblical principles:

1. Deepening Communion with God

Jesus' retreats to pray, such as before choosing His disciples (Luke 6:12-13) or after ministering to crowds (Mark 1:35), show that solitude fosters intimacy with God. When we step away from distractions—whether the busyness of daily life, technology, or worldly pressures—we create space to hear God's voice and experience His presence. Psalm 46:10 (NIV) encourages us to "Be still, and know that I am God." This stillness allows us to focus on God's character and promises, strengthening our faith and grounding our prayers in His truth.

2. Aligning with God's Will

Strategic prayer in solitude helps us align our desires with God's will, as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39), where He prayed, "Yet not as I will, but as you will." By removing external noise, we can better discern the Holy Spirit's guidance, as Jude 1:20 (NIV) urges us to pray "in the Holy Spirit" to build our faith. This alignment ensures our prayers are not driven by fleeting emotions or worldly influences but by God's eternal purposes, making them more effective.

and powerful (1 John 5:14-15).

3. Renewing Spiritual Strength

Jesus' habit of withdrawing to pray equipped Him to face the demands of ministry, opposition, and even the cross. Isaiah 40:31 (NIV) promises that "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength." When we prioritize strategic prayer, we tap into God's strength, as the disciples did in Acts 4:29-31, where their bold prayers after threats resulted in being "filled with the Holy Spirit" and speaking "the word of God boldly." Solitude in prayer recharges us spiritually, enabling us to face life's challenges with courage and resilience.

4. Cultivating Persistence in Prayer

Strategic prayer, as modeled by Jesus, is not a one-time event but a continual practice. The Early Church followed this pattern, as seen in their persistent prayers (Acts 1:14), which led to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Paul echoes this in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NIV), urging us to "pray continually." By consistently withdrawing to pray, we develop a disciplined prayer life that sustains us through trials and positions us to receive God's breakthroughs.

Application for Our Prayer Life

By emulating Jesus' practice of retreating from the world's chaos, we create an environment where our prayers can be focused, intentional, and Spirit-led. This empowers us to experience God's presence more deeply, align our petitions with His will, and draw on His strength to fulfill His calling. As Hebrews 4:16 (NIV) encourages, we can "approach God's throne of grace with confidence," knowing that our strategic prayers invite His power into our lives and circumstances.

Praying in the Power of the Holy Spirit

Praying in the power of the Holy Spirit is a vital practice for Christians seeking breakthroughs—whether spiritual, emotional, physical, or situational—because it aligns believers with God's will, empowers their prayers, and invites divine intervention. Below is a biblical explanation grounded in Scripture, supplemented by insights from respected theologians, to address how this practice facilitates breakthroughs.

1. The Holy Spirit Empowers Prayer

Scripture: Romans 8:26-27 (ESV) – “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Explanation: When we pray in the Spirit, we rely on His guidance to pray according to God’s perfect will. Our human limitations often hinder us from knowing how or what to pray for, especially in times of crisis or when seeking breakthroughs. The Holy Spirit intercedes, ensuring our prayers align with God’s purposes, making them more effective for receiving answers or breakthroughs. This passage suggests that the Spirit’s intercession can lead to divine outcomes that surpass human understanding, facilitating breakthroughs in seemingly impossible situations.

2. Praying in the Spirit Builds Faith and Strength

Scripture: Jude 1:20 (ESV) – “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit.”

Explanation: Praying in the Holy Spirit strengthens faith, which is essential for receiving breakthroughs. Faith is the conduit through which God often works (Hebrews 11:6). By praying in the Spirit, believers are edified, their trust in God grows, and they are better positioned to receive His promises. Breakthroughs often require persistent faith, and the Spirit empowers believers to persevere in prayer.

3. The Spirit Brings Revelation and Guidance

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 (ESV) – “But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him’—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.”

Explanation: The Holy Spirit reveals God's plans and purposes, which may include the steps needed for a breakthrough. When praying in the Spirit, believers gain insight into God's will, enabling them to pray with precision and confidence. This revelation can lead to breakthroughs by clarifying the path forward or removing spiritual blindness that hinders progress.

4. The Spirit Enables Boldness and Access to God

Scripture: Ephesians 6:18 (ESV) – “Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.”

Explanation: Praying in the Spirit fosters boldness and persistence in prayer, which are critical for breakthroughs. Ephesians 3:12 notes that through faith in Christ, believers have “boldness and access with confidence” to God. The Spirit empowers believers to approach God's throne boldly (Hebrews 4:16), asking for breakthroughs with assurance of His grace and power.

5. The Spirit Facilitates Spiritual Warfare

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (ESV) – “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.”

Explanation: Breakthroughs often involve overcoming spiritual strongholds—barriers like doubt, fear, or demonic opposition. Praying in the Spirit equips believers with divine power to wage spiritual warfare. The Spirit's intercession and empowerment help dismantle these obstacles, paving the way for breakthroughs.

Insights from Theologians

1. A.W. Tozer:

Tozer, a renowned 20th-century pastor and author, emphasized the Holy Spirit's role in prayer: “The Spirit-filled heart is a praying heart. When the Spirit fills us, He creates a longing for God that expresses itself in prayer.” Tozer taught that the Spirit's presence in prayer

transforms it from a ritual to a dynamic interaction with God, often resulting in spiritual breakthroughs as believers align with His will.

2. Charles Spurgeon:

Spurgeon, a 19th-century Baptist preacher, wrote, “Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence.” He believed that praying in the Spirit taps into God’s omnipotent power, enabling believers to receive answers that break through barriers. Spurgeon often linked the Spirit’s work in prayer to revival and personal transformation, key aspects of breakthroughs.

3. D.A. Carson:

In his book *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, Carson highlights Romans 8:26-27, noting that the Spirit’s intercession ensures prayers are not misdirected. He argues that breakthroughs occur when believers rely on the Spirit to pray God’s will, as this aligns their requests with divine purposes, increasing the likelihood of answered prayers.

4. John Piper:

Piper, a contemporary theologian, emphasizes that praying in the Spirit involves both the Spirit’s guidance and the believer’s active participation. In his sermons, he explains that the Spirit empowers believers to pray with faith and fervency, which are critical for breakthroughs. Piper points to Ephesians 6:18, suggesting that persistent, Spirit-led prayer overcomes spiritual resistance.

Practical Implications for Breakthroughs

- **Alignment with God’s Will:** Praying in the Spirit ensures that requests align with God’s plans, increasing the likelihood of breakthroughs (1 John 5:14-15).
- **Spiritual Empowerment:** The Spirit provides strength to persevere in prayer, especially when breakthroughs are delayed (Luke 18:1-8).
- **Breaking Strongholds:** The Spirit equips believers to overcome spiritual, emotional, or situational barriers through divine power.
- **Increased Faith and Expectation:** The Spirit builds confidence in God’s ability to act, fostering the faith needed for breakthroughs (Mark 11:24).

How to Pray in the Power of the Holy Spirit

- 1. Invite the Spirit's Presence:** Begin prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to guide and empower you (Luke 11:13).
- 2. Pray in Faith:** Trust that the Spirit is interceding and aligning your prayers with God's will (Romans 8:27).
- 3. Use Spiritual Gifts:** For some, praying in the Spirit may involve praying in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:14-15), which edifies the believer and aligns prayer with God's purposes.
- 4. Be Persistent:** Continue praying with perseverance, trusting the Spirit to sustain you (Ephesians 6:18).
- 5. Listen for Guidance:** Allow the Spirit to reveal specific scriptures, insights, or directions that inform your prayers (John 16:13).

Conclusion

Praying in the power of the Holy Spirit facilitates breakthroughs by aligning believers with God's will, empowering their prayers, and equipping them to overcome obstacles. Scriptural teachings, supported by theologians like Tozer, Spurgeon, Carson, and Piper, emphasize that the Spirit's role in prayer brings divine revelation, boldness, and power, enabling believers to experience God's transformative work. By relying on the Spirit, Christians can pray with confidence, persistence, and faith, positioning themselves to receive breakthroughs in accordance with God's perfect plan. (1)

Commentary on Main Scriptures

Ephesians 6:18

6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. This verse, although not naming another "weapon" in the believers' armor, does continue the thought of 6:17. As we take the sword of the Spirit, God's Word, we must also pray in the Spirit on all occasions. Praying in the Spirit means that the Spirit helps us when we pray (Romans 8:26); the Spirit prays on our behalf (Romans 8:27); the Spirit makes God accessible (Ephesians 2:18); the Spirit gives us confidence when we pray (Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:6). He inspires and guides us when we pray. He helps us communicate with God and

also brings God's response to us.

Paul was not calling prayer a weapon; instead, he was giving the how-to's for taking up the armor described in the previous verses. We must not underestimate Satan's forces. He will strike in different ways at different people; thus, we need to pray "all kinds" of prayers, allowing for all kinds of requests. Satan will attack at various times, but he will always be attacking someone. Believers need to be praying always. Satan will attack when we least expect it, so we need to be alert to prayer needs when they arise. Satan will rarely let up if he thinks he can win the battle, so believers must keep on praying, no matter how long it takes. No believer is exempt from being Satan's target—Satan demands battle against his enemies (believers). Thus all saints need our prayer support—no matter who they are, what position they hold, or how strong they may seem to be. No believer can stand alone in this battle. For whom do you pray? How often do you pray?

How can anyone pray on all occasions? Make quick, brief prayers your habitual response to every situation you meet throughout the day. Order your life around God's desires and teachings so that your very life becomes a prayer. You don't have to isolate yourself from other people and from daily work in order to pray constantly. You can make prayer your life and your life a prayer while living in a world that needs God's powerful influence. This does not happen by human effort alone. Such prayers are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Only in him can we pray the effective, powerful, and timely prayers that will change the world.

Jude 1:20

20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Even as the false teachers attempted to cause divisions (v. 19), the believers (once again addressed as dear friends, as in v. 17) could stand against the false teachers if they followed Jude's advice in four areas. First, they must build on the firm foundation of their faith, standing strong and unified (see also 1 Corinthians 3:9–17; Ephesians 2:20–22). They could do this by staying close to other believers and by continuing in worship, including taking the Lord's Supper. As in verse 3 above, their most holy faith refers to

the entire body of beliefs taught by the apostles and held by Christians. The believers could “build themselves up” in their faith by studying and learning the Scriptures (Acts 2:42; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 5:13–6:3; see also Ephesians 4:12–16). We should note that believers are to work together as they build themselves up as a community, as Christ’s temple. It was “your faith” as opposed to the false teachers’ heretical teaching; it was “most holy” because it came from the most holy God. This faith alone transforms lives and gives eternal life.

Second, Jude encouraged the believers to pray in the Holy Spirit, meaning to pray in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit prays on behalf of believers (Romans 8:26–27; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 6:18), opens their minds to Jesus (John 14:26), and teaches believers more about their Lord (John 15:26). This most likely includes, but is not limited to, prayer in tongues. Because the false teachers were “devoid of the Spirit” (v. 19), they could not truly pray and their prayers would not be heard. Indeed, they may have put aside prayer altogether, to their own detriment. Prayer is the lifeline that connects all Christians to their Savior. Believers must never stop praying.

IN THE SPIRIT

Jude urged the believers to “pray in the Holy Spirit.” Real prayer takes many forms, but fake prayer lacks one essential: the Holy Spirit.

Praying in the Spirit means

- you pray to know God’s mind before you insist on telling God about your opinions
- your happiness rests more in God’s assurance of love and forgiveness than whether your prayers for X, Y, and Z get answered today
- your heart and mind rejoice in God, confirming that you belong to him, no matter how many struggles you face

Today, be quiet before God, ask the Holy Spirit to fill your heart, then pray. God will take your stress away and give you peace and strength for the day.

Hebrews 4:16

4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Through his death on the cross, our great High Priest, Jesus, opened access to God. Now people can approach God directly because of Jesus' sacrifice for sins. Because Jesus gave his life to do this for us, let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace. This verse is an open invitation to regard God as a great ally and true friend. Yes, God occupies a throne, a seat of power and authority, but it is a throne of grace, not a throne of greed or domination. The term "throne of grace" describes the constant care and love offered to God's undeserving children. God's grace is a characteristic of his reign. "Grace" means undeserved favor. Our ability to approach God does not come from any merit of our own but depends entirely on him.

Believers can "come boldly" and confidently to this throne, for the king is our Father, who loves us as his children. At God's throne, we will not receive anger or be ignored; instead, we will obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. God is not only concerned with converting people and collecting disciples; he also cares and nurtures those children who are his own. He listens to our needs. No request is insignificant, and no problem is too small for the one who sits on the throne of grace. God will never reject a Christian's plea or ignore one who brings requests before God. When we come to God, we are promised "mercy," God's loving-kindness and forgiveness. When we come to God, we will receive "grace," God's undeserved favor, that will help in time of need. No matter what the problem, no matter what sin caused the need, God promises to help us at just the right time—his time. This doesn't mean that God promises to solve every need the moment we come to him. Nor does it mean that God will erase the natural consequences of any sin that was committed. It does mean, however, that God listens, cares, and will answer in his perfect way, in his perfect timing

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

5:16 Rejoice always. The next three verses give three simple ingredients that believers ought to daily mix into their lives: joy, prayer, and thanks. When these three qualities are present, believers

will be vibrant witnesses to a needy world.

Paul counseled this persecuted church to rejoice always. Paul had learned the secret of being joyful, even in the middle of great trial and suffering (verses quoted from NIV):

- **Acts 16:25:** “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”
- **Romans 5:3:** “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance.”
- **2 Corinthians 6:4-10:** “Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”
- **2 Corinthians 12:10:** “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
- **Colossians 1:24:** “Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”
Paul had just commanded the believers to love one another and then to rejoice. Interestingly, when Jesus spoke to his disciples about loving one another, he also talked to them about joy:
- **As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.** If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that

your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:9-13 NRSV, emphasis added)

True joy transcends the rolling waves of circumstance. Joy comes from a consistent relationship with Jesus Christ. When believers' lives are intertwined with Christ, he will help them to walk through adversity without sinking into debilitating lows and to manage prosperity without moving into deceptive highs. The joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep believers rejoicing "always." They can rejoice because of their sure salvation and their future hope. Nothing that happens on this earth can compare with the glory that awaits God's people.

But believers are not required to conjure up this joy, for the ability to rejoice has been given to them as a gift—one fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy (Galatians 5:22; see also Romans 14:17).

Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan. – John Bunyan

Our joy, prayers, and thankfulness should not fluctuate with our circumstances or feelings. Obeying these three commands—be joyful, pray continually, and give thanks—often goes against our natural inclinations. When we make a conscious decision to do what God says, however, we will begin to see people in a new perspective. When we do God's will, we will find it easier to be joyful and thankful.

5:17 Pray without ceasing. Paul did not expect believers to spend all their time on their knees or with their eyes closed when he said they should pray without ceasing. In fact, he was quite adamant that everyone had work to do (5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, 11). It is possible, however, for believers to have a prayerful attitude at all times. This attitude is built upon acknowledging dependence on God, realizing his presence within, and determining to obey him fully. Then it will be natural to pray frequent, spontaneous, short prayers. Prayer is not to be done by the church leader only, nor is it meant to be carried out only in worship services. Instead, prayer can be a part of every believer's daily walk, and Paul noted how important this would be for one's spiritual life (Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:19). Jesus told his disciples that "they should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1

NIV). Believers should pray together in worship, spend time alone with God in prayer, and also pray to God throughout each day as the desire to rejoice or the need for help arises.

5:18 In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Notice that Paul did not say “for” everything give thanks, but in everything. Evil will happen to believers, and it does not come from God, so they should not thank him for it. But when evil strikes, they can still be thankful for God’s presence and for the good he will accomplish through the distress. Paul had learned that “God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them” (Romans 8:28 NLT). Usually God uses difficult times to build people’s character and strengthen their faith. It is easy to give thanks for the blessings; it is more difficult to give thanks for the blessings in disguise. By far the most difficult task is to give thanks in everything—even the situations that make no sense or are extremely painful. Yet this difficult task has been assigned to all believers for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Learning to give thanks in everything means learning to trust God completely, knowing that he is in charge, and understanding that all that happens is part of a larger picture that believers may not see. When a believer can give thanks so willingly, he or she has trusted that God is completely in control of all situations and is working out his will.

Colossians 4:2

4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. As he began to draw his letter to a close, Paul turned his focus back to the church as a whole, reminding the Colossians of their corporate responsibilities.

The believers were responsible to pray; prayer was their lifeline to God. To devote themselves to prayer meant that they should be persistent and unwilling to give up, even though their prayers may seem to go unanswered. Paul’s advice to the Thessalonians to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17 NIV) has the same meaning. Their devotion to prayer did not mean that they should spend all their time on their knees, but that they should have a prayerful attitude at all times. This attitude would be built upon acknowledging their dependence on God, realizing his presence within them, and determining to obey him fully. Then they would find it natural to pray frequent, spontaneous, short

prayers. A prayerful attitude is not a substitute for regular times of prayer but should be an outgrowth of those times.

They also ought to be keeping alert in prayer. Paul may have been referring to not dozing off, to being alert in their devotion, or to being alert for God's answers and then thankful when they came. More likely, he was focusing on the anticipation of the Lord's coming. The Lord could return at any time, so believers should be found alert and waiting.

As Paul had mentioned several times (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15-17), the believers ought always to be thankful. Thankfulness implies understanding all that God has done and anticipating what he promises.

Acts 4:23-31

THE BELIEVERS PRAY FOR BOLDNESS / 4:23-31

After being sternly threatened by the same group of men who had orchestrated the crucifixion of Jesus only six weeks earlier, the followers of Jesus gathered and prayed. Their prayers weren't for an end to persecution or for easy times. Rather, the believers asked God for the boldness necessary to continue proclaiming the good news about Jesus. God gave them what every church needs: a reminder of his power and a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit.

4:23 As soon as they were freed, Peter and John found the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. Upon their release, the apostles found the other believers and shared with them the details of their experience with the leading priests and elders who made up the Council.

4:24 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." In the face of this recent persecution, the believers spontaneously joined together in prayer to acknowledge God's sovereign control of all things (see Psalm 146:6; Isaiah 37:16). The Greek word *despota*, translated "Sovereign Lord," is the word from which we derive our English "despot." Used infrequently in the New Testament (Luke 2:29; 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 1:4; Revelation 6:10), this term calls to mind God's powerful and absolute control. The believers undoubtedly found comfort in

remembering that the God they served had made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. This appeal to the God of creation shows that God, who had power to create the universe, will have power over their enemies. Everything in heaven and earth is subject to God and his will.

PRAYING THROUGH PROBLEMS

Notice how the believers prayed. First they praised God; then they told God their specific problem and asked for his help. They did not ask God to remove the problem but to help them deal with it. This is a model for us to follow when we pray. We may ask God to remove our problems, and he may choose to do so. But we must recognize that often he chooses to leave our problems in place and then give us the strength and courage to deal with them.

4:25-26 “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?’ ”

The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’ ” The group’s prayer (probably voiced by a single individual) cited Psalm 2, a messianic hymn written by King David. Psalm 2 describes the rebellion of the nations and the coming of Christ to establish his eternal reign. David may have written these words during a conspiracy against Israel by leaders of some of the surrounding nations. Chosen and anointed by God, David knew that God would fulfill his promise to bring the Messiah into the world through his bloodline (2 Samuel 7:16; 1 Chronicles 17:11–12). This psalm is also cited in other places in the New Testament (see 13:33; Hebrews 1:5–6; 5:5; Revelation 2:26–27; 12:5; 19:15) because of its prophetic description of Jesus, the Messiah.

The believers saw the Jewish leaders’ opposition to Jesus (and to them, his appointed representatives) as fulfilling this ancient prophecy. What irony that the Jewish rulers themselves took the place of the raging Gentile nations and became the object of the church’s mission. Jesus is identified both here and again in 4:27 as the Anointed One—God’s Messiah. The raging nations are paralleled with the Gentiles, the peoples with Israel. The kings of the earth compare to Herod, and the

rulers are represented by Pontius Pilate, as noted in the following verse.

4:27 “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.” In

fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 2, “kings” and “rulers” had gathered against God’s Anointed One. Herod was Herod Antipas, appointed by the Romans to rule over the territory of Galilee. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor over Judea who had bowed to pressure from the mob of Gentiles and the people of Israel in Jerusalem. All of these had conspired against Jesus, God’s anointed.

When Jesus was brought to trial, the Jewish Council had, without concern for justice or their own laws, found a way to sentence him to death. But they could not carry out capital punishment—the Romans had to do that. So the religious leaders had taken Jesus to Pilate in order to gain the death penalty and have it carried out. Pilate, at first, had not wanted to execute Jesus, because he could not find any crime that Jesus had committed. After Pilate had heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he had promptly sent him to be judged by Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, who was in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Herod, however, had only mocked Jesus and sent him back to Pilate. By this time mobs had formed calling for Jesus’ death. (Read Matthew 26:57–27:26; Mark 14:53–15:15; Luke 22:66–23:24; John 18:12–19:16.) For more on Herod, see the chart “The Herod Family” on page 417 [25:21–22].

4:28 “In fact, everything they did occurred according to your eternal will and plan.” While it seemed that Satan had gotten the upper hand when the Son of God was crucified on the cross, in reality, everything ... occurred according to [God’s] eternal will and plan. The believers declared that God is the sovereign Lord of all events; he rules history to fulfill his purpose. What his will determines, his power carries out. No army, government, or council can stand in God’s way.

4:29–30 “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through

the name of your holy servant Jesus.” Common in the Old Testament are imprecatory prayers (requests for God to bring swift and harsh justice on the enemies of his people)—Psalms 7, 35, 40, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137, 139, 144. Here the apostles prayed not for divine vengeance but that God would consider the threats that had been leveled against them by the Jewish leadership. The believers did not pray that God would remove the threats, take away the possibility of persecution, or even protect them. Instead, they prayed that God would enable the believers, his servants, to continue to witness with great boldness, no matter what. They also asked for displays of power to confirm their message—stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders. These believers were not afraid to ask God for great power and wonders in order that his name would be glorified.

BIBLICAL BOLDNESS

Boldness is not reckless impulsiveness. Boldness requires courage to press on through our fears and do what we know is right. How can we be more bold? Like the disciples, we need to pray with others for that courage. To gain boldness, you can:

- pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to give you courage;
- look for opportunities in your family and neighborhood to talk about Christ;
- realize that rejection, social discomfort, and embarrassment are not necessarily persecution; and
- start where you are by being bolder in small ways.

4:31 After this prayer, the building where they were meeting shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they preached God’s message with boldness. God’s answer of the apostles’ prayer was both swift and powerful. When the building shook, the believers realized that God had not only heard their prayer, but he also was pleased with it. The believers received a fresh filling with the Holy Spirit, which renewed their courage to go out and preach God’s message with boldness, just as they had requested (4:29).

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, (1) Logos Bible Program, Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, Guzik, David, Life Application Bible Commentary, Factbook Logos bible, Barton, Bruce B., and Philip

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Sermon Notes:

Week 5 - In His Footsteps / “Praying Strategically Pt 2”

I want to welcome everyone who is joining us online! Make sure you are taking advantage of our AVC Connections. Here they are:

- YouTube
- App
- Facebook/Website

[Let's Pray]

We are in a Summer Sermon Series titled: “In His Footsteps”. Two weeks ago, I talked about Praying Strategically. Today is Part 2 of that sermon: Praying Strategically Part 2.

The Gospels of Jesus Christ are the backbone to the rest of the Bible. I mentioned an important theme in Jesus' life and ministry: Prayer!

Jesus withdrew from the people so that He had supernatural impacts on people's lives.

We read stuff like this in the Gospels: “News about Jesus spread more and more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and be healed of their illnesses. So Jesus often withdrew to lonely (uninhabited) places and prayed.” (Luke 5:15-16)

I think it's important to point out why Jesus made it a priority to get

away.

3 Important Reasons Jesus Got Away to “Pray Strategically”:

1. To get away from the Noise
2. To get away from the Distractions
3. To get away from the Chaos

Things we should take serious note from.

Strategic Prayer is not a one-and-done prayer model, like praying for our food.

Praying Strategically means we are praying over and over again if necessary, or until we receive breakthrough. Believe it or not, Jesus prayed with people more than once. Here is one example:

Read Mark 8:22-25

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?” He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

We can make the mistake of praying lackadaisically and not consistently. No! Put it on a list and pray, pray, pray every day.

We also must pray with authority—not, “Well, Jesus, I know you have other things to worry about.” No! The Lord can handle everything. Don't pray weak—go to town!

Scripture says: And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:18)

Scripture says: But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. (Jude 1:20)

Friends, don't underestimate the power of God. Amen!

Strategic Prayer takes these two things:

1. Persistence

2. Confidence

Hebrews 4:16 talks about the Confidence: Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Now let's talk about Strategic Persistent Prayer. Scripture points us in the right direction:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Romans 12:12 (ESV) says: Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

[Story of Persistent Prayer]

We are going to hop into our main closing text for today in Acts 4. But first, I want to give you a summary to make the passage come alive:

“In Acts 3, Peter and John heal a lame man at the temple gate called Beautiful in Jesus' name, amazing the crowd. Peter preaches repentance and faith in Jesus, leading many to believe. In Acts 4, the priests and Sadducees arrest them for proclaiming Jesus' resurrection. Before the Sanhedrin, Peter boldly declares that the healing and salvation come through Jesus alone. Despite threats to stop teaching, Peter and John refused to be silenced. Released, the believers pray for boldness, and are filled with the Holy Spirit, and continue preaching courageously despite opposition.”

Let's read the strategic boldness of the disciples of Christ: Acts 4:13

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Read Acts 4:23-31

Here's the deal: The disciples were not going to cave to the enemy's attacks or run scared. No, they fought! So should we.

Friends, let's pray with bold strategic prayers. Amen!

Devotional Questions

Praying strategically with power—what does this mean? Praying in the Holy Spirit involves aligning oneself with the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit during prayer. Jude 1:20 (NIV) encourages believers, stating, “But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit.” This form of prayer means seeking the Spirit's help to express our deepest longings, intercede effectively, and remain in communion with God.

The power of praying in the Holy Spirit lies in the intimate connection it fosters with God. It allows believers to transcend human limitations and rely on the Spirit's wisdom and strength. This practice ensures our prayers align with God's will, invoking His power and presence in our lives and the world around us. Through this, believers find comfort, guidance, and the assurance that they are supported by divine insight and strength.

Please read the following passages and answer the devotional questions below:

1. Ephesians 6:18

We are to pray in what? With _____ of prayers and requests.

2. Hebrews 4:16

How should we approach the Lord?

3. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Colossians 4:2, Romans 12:12

Praying strategically means persistence in prayer. What do these passages have in common?

4. Acts 4:23-31

What can we learn about powerful, strategic prayer from the disciples? Should we be this bold?

