

WEEK 5

PRAYER IS THE WORK (ACTS 4:31)

* This message is mostly from Ryan Fontenot's book called "LIVE SENT" (Chapter 3)

Acts 4:31 "And **when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.**"

I spent years of my Christian life, and years of my ministry *talking* about prayer, but doing very little of it.

"The great people of the earth today are the people who pray, (not) those who talk about prayer." – S.D. Gordon

Illustration: You've probably heard me mention D.L. Moody – one of the greatest evangelists who ever lived. Years ago, there was a Christian conference in Indianapolis to discuss "How to Reach the Masses." In other words, it was a conference on "How to Live Sent." But D.L. Moody was a couple of blocks away preaching on a street corner.

The crowd became so large on the street corner that it had to move to another location so Moody announced that he would preach again a couple of blocks away at the Academy of Music building. So, the crowd followed him down the street where they filled the main floor of the building and he preached again with such power that the crowd was moved to tears.

But he ended up having only a few minutes to preach because the conference on "How to Reach the Masses" was actually gathering in the same building. So, while the conference was TALKING about how to reach the masses, D. L. Moody was actually DOING it!¹

But Moody understood that, in order to LIVE SENT, he needed power – a power that doesn't come from within us...

Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come

¹ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem (immediate community) and in all Judea (state) and Samaria (nation), and to the end of the earth (farthest nations)."

You see, we often think that we're supposed to pray and *then* go and do the work of God. But actually, prayer IS the work. That doesn't excuse us from actually opening our mouth and sharing the gospel – it just means that prayer is the key to genuine results from our work.

So, we need the supernatural *power* of God in order to do the *work* of God. And that power comes from prayer...

"The one concern of the devil is to keep the Saints from prayer. He 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

Prayer changes things. And more importantly, prayer changes *us*. So, if we're going to LIVE SENT, what should we pray for? Let me give you seven things...

1. Pray for a heart for God.

Mark 12:30 "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

You see, our greatest commandment *from* God is to *love* God. So, we need to ask God daily to give us a deep abiding love for Jesus. Remember: God is more interested in *you* than what you can do for Him.

God wants you to know Him before you go and make Him known to others. And the more you know Him, the better you will represent Him. So, seek the Lord with all your heart.

Matthew 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Our first priority – above ALL other things – should be our daily walk and relationship with Jesus!

2. Pray for a heart for others.

Earlier, Jesus gave us the greatest commandment – to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. But notice what He called the *second* greatest commandment...

Mark 12:31 *“The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

Our love for God should drive us to love others. Yes, it's true that people can sometimes be very difficult to love. But we should continually ask God to give us a genuine love for all people, in all places, at all times.

Illustration: Dan's heart for Armenia. He's been to many other countries and certainly loves all nations, but God broke his heart for that particular people group.

3. Pray for open doors.

We all go to different places every day. We go to school, practice, work, the neighbor's house, a friend's house, the grocery store, etc. And as we go, we need to ask God to open doors of opportunities for us to tell other people about Jesus...

Colossians 4:3 *“At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison.”*

In fact, these opportunities are all around us each, so we also need to ask God to open *our eyes* to see those opportunities. And it's amazing to me that even though Paul was in prison when he wrote this verse, he was asking God to give him opportunities to share the gospel in prison – NOT to be *released* from prison!



Is this how we see our school or job? Are we praying that God will “get us out of there” – like it's a prison – rather than asking God to give us opportunities to share?

As you go about your day, ask God to open doors of opportunity to share the gospel, and that He would open your mouth to tell them about Jesus!

4. Pray for open hearts.

Have you ever been talking to someone only to realize everything you were telling them just wasn't registering? It's like, no matter how hard you try to explain it to them, they're just not getting it.

When it comes to sharing the gospel with somebody, the Bible tells us that God is the one who opens their hearts to hear/understand the truth about Jesus. Paul gives an example of this happening...

Acts 16:13–15 “And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well...”

When we pray for God to open hearts, we're asking God to do something that we are absolutely unable to do, but God is more than able to do!

5. Pray for boldness.

Listen to Paul's prayer...

Ephesians 6:19–20 “And [pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

In this prayer, we see one of the boldest men to ever live, asking Christians to pray that he would have boldness.



So, why did Paul have so much boldness already? Because he *prayed* for it!

This is how ALL of us should pray. You see, talking to others about Jesus is spiritual warfare. If we don't ask God to give us supernatural boldness, we will never open our mouths and tell anyone about Jesus. But if we ask God daily for boldness, He promises to empower us.

So, make it a habit each day to ask the Lord to give you boldness to open up your mouth and tell someone about Jesus.

6. Pray for specific people.

“The more specific your prayers are, the more glory God receives.” – Mark Batterson (“The Circle Maker”)

When we pray specifically, we give God the opportunity to *answer* specifically. When you and I have a list of people that we’re specifically praying for, it glorifies God and strengthens our faith when we see Him answer those prayers specifically.



Who in your life specifically needs Jesus? Write down their name(s), and start praying!

Illustration: Shooting a target way off. Would you shoot a shotgun or rifle with a strategic shot?

FREE Resources to help you pray specifically:

- “Who’s Your One” bookmark.
- 30-Day Prayer Guide (expanded companion to the bookmark).

7. Pray for more Christians to LIVE SENT.

Matthew 9:36–38 *“When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”*

Ask God daily to raise up more believers who will boldly share Christ with others as they go about their daily routines.

Illustration: IMB missionaries from United States is declining

Small Groups