



**The Prayer ... Praying As They Prayed**  
**Acts 4:23-31**

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia  
©Monty Watson – May 24, 2026

---

## **THE PRAYER ... PRAYING AS THEY PRAYED**

### **Acts 4:23-31**

The book of Acts records the birth of the Church and the thirty-year period following the resurrection of Jesus. The book is filled with dramatic events and incredible stories of faith. Those who were there heard His teaching and witnessed His miracles. They saw Him die and they saw Him alive again. They believed He was the Son of God. They were convinced it was true. They were compelled to talk about it. And they were courageous to take a stand. That makes this book sacred ground. These first Christians are our mentors, and there is so much we can learn from them.

One of the most important lessons we need to learn from them is about prayer. Prayer was a way of life for them, as natural and necessary as breathing. Prayer was the driving force in the early church, because when they prayed, the Holy Spirit moved. We read in the book of Acts ...

- “With one mind they were continually devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14, NAS).<sup>1</sup>
- “Many were gathered together and were praying” (Acts 12:12, NAS).
- When commissioning missionaries, “they fasted, prayed, and laid their hands on them, and sent them away” (Acts 13:3, NAS).
- When selecting elders, “with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord” (Acts 14:23, ESV).
- Paul encouraged the early believers to “rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and be constant in prayer” (Romans 12:12, ESV).<sup>2</sup>

Prayer was the driving force in the early church.

In the 1st century, one of the earliest church fathers, Clement of Rome, who was personally ordained by Peter, prayed, “I beg, O Master, to be my helper and protector. To save the afflicted, have mercy on the lowly, raise the fallen ... feed the hungry, ransom the prisoners, raise up the sick, and comfort the faint-hearted.”<sup>3</sup> Clement poured out his heart asking God to help those in need.

Also in the 1st century, Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of the Apostle John, prayed, “O Lord, you have formed us into one great choir, to sing your song, to praise the Father and to praise the Son, Jesus Christ.”

In the 2nd century, Irenaeus of Lyons expanded Christianity into France, and prayed, “I appeal to you, Lord, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob and Israel, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... You made heaven and earth. You rule supreme over all that is. You are the true, the only God ... Through our Lord Jesus Christ ... may we know You.”

In the 3rd century, Cyprian of Carthage took Christianity into North Africa, and desperately prayed, “We beg you O God, the enemies of the church are forever provoking and irritating us, O

that you would tame their wild hearts ... May their minds, clouded by the darkness of their sins, repent and see the light.”

And in the 4th century, Ambrose of Milan prayed, “O Lord, who has mercy upon us all, take away my sins, and kindle in me the fire of your Holy Spirit. Take away my heart of stone and give me a heart to love and adore you, a heart to delight in you, to follow and to enjoy you.”

We can go back even further in history to earlier prayers, to 33 AD, to prayers recorded in the New Testament just months after the resurrection.

In Acts 3-4, Peter performed a miracle on the steps of the temple. Peter declared the man was healed by the name of Jesus. And there were two purposes of that miracle. One, the miracle proved the power of His name to heal, and two, the miracle proved the power of His name to save. As Peter said, “There is salvation in no one else, there is no other name ... by which we can be saved” (Acts 4:12, NAS). Then Peter and John were arrested, interrogated, threatened, and ordered to stop preaching about Jesus. Acts 4:23 tells us what happened next.

As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. When they heard the report, ***all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God.***

“O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them, you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our father David, your servant, saying, ‘Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one.’”<sup>4</sup>

In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will.

And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, boldness to speak your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power, may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

After they prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:23-31, NLT).

This was an actual prayer of the early church. Reading it puts us in the room with them. We can feel the mood in the room. We can hear their faith. This is how the first Christians prayed. They are our mentors, and we can learn so much from them. And one thing we can learn is that their prayers revealed their priorities. And the same is true of us. What we pray reveals what’s important to us. Of course, it’s appropriate to pray for health issues and family issues and a thousand other problems we face. ***But when the church prays, the Gospel must take priority.*** The mission must take priority. As they faced increasing opposition, they did not pray for political revolution. They did not pray for comfort or protection or prosperity. They prayed for boldness to share the Gospel. So as we learn from them, may we pray as they prayed.

## GOD'S AUTHORITY

How did they pray? *They prayed believing God's authority was greater than any other.* "As soon as they were freed, Peter and John returned to the other believers and told them what the leading priests and elders had said. When they heard the report, all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God. 'O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them'" (Acts 4:23-24, NLT).

Their immediate reaction to threat was to go to God. "All the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God." They turned to God. And with one voice, with one mind, they cried out to Him.<sup>5</sup> "Together in prayer to God." Of course, private, personal prayer is important. But corporate prayer is like an orchestra compared to a solo instrument. Listening to a piano solo is nice, but listening to an orchestra is much more thrilling.<sup>6</sup> The harmony of the instruments, the power of all the instruments playing together, penetrates the soul and lifts the spirit. So the harmony and power of praying together lifts our spirits.

When they prayed, they acknowledged God as the "Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them." As Creator, He is certainly greater than any power on earth.<sup>7</sup> David said, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made ... He spoke, and it came to be" (Psalm 33:6, 9, ESV). Paul said, "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth ... and he gives life and breath ... For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:24, 25, 28, NIV). When we pray, we pray to the one who created us. We pray to the one who gives us life and breath.

As they prayed, they called Him "Sovereign Lord." Sovereignty means God is above and beyond everyone and everything. It means He is supreme. There is no one greater or higher or bigger or stronger or wiser. No one can question Him, challenge Him, oppose Him, defeat Him, or compare to Him. Psalms says, "God reigns over the nations, God sits on his holy throne ... His sovereignty rules over all" (Psalm 47:8, ESV, Psalm 103:19, NAS).<sup>8</sup>

How did the early church pray? They prayed believing God was on His throne. They prayed believing God was bigger than their enemies, bigger than their fears, and bigger than problems. They prayed believing His authority was greater than any other.

## GOD'S PLAN

*They prayed believing God's plan would prevail.* God's plan was unfolding before their eyes, a plan that could not fail, and they were a part of it.

Whoever was leading this prayer quoted David from Psalm 2. "You spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our father David, your servant, saying, 'Why are the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one'" (Acts 4:25-26).<sup>9</sup>

Notice a couple of interesting details in this part of the prayer. Who is the anointed one? Originally, in Psalm 2, David was talking about himself, about the opposition he faced as the

anointed king of Israel. But Psalm 2 was also a prophecy predicting opposition to the Messiah, the Christ. So this prayer identifies Jesus as the “anointed one.” Another interesting detail. If we were to go back and read David’s original prophecy in Psalm 2, we would see the Lord’s response to the world’s opposition. It says, “He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them” (Psalm 2:4, NAS). So what was the point of Psalm 2? Opposing God is futile. And why were these early Christians praying Psalm 2? To remind them that God’s plan will prevail and God’s “anointed one” will be victorious.

The prayer continued, “The rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one. In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will” (Acts 4:27-28, NLT).

In the first sermon after the resurrection, Peter declared the cross was God’s idea, all part of His “predetermined plan” (Acts 2:23, NAS). And the first Christians believed that. They believed God’s plan was unfolding before their eyes, a plan that could not fail.

Perhaps they remembered Job saying, “I now know that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2, ESV). Perhaps they remembered David saying, “The plans of the Lord will stand firm forever” (Psalm 33:11, NIV). Or perhaps they remembered Solomon saying, “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” (Proverbs 19:21, NIV).<sup>10</sup>

They prayed believing God’s plan was unfolding before their eyes, a plan that could not fail, and they were a part of it.

## GOD’S SPIRIT

As I said earlier, our prayers reveal our priorities. Of course, it’s appropriate to pray for health issues and family issues and a thousand other problems we face. But when the church prays, the Gospel must take priority. Our focus, our priority, our prayers must be about the mission. As they faced increasing opposition, they did not pray for political revolution. They did not pray for comfort or protection or prosperity. They prayed for boldness to share the Gospel.

***They prayed asking God’s Spirit to fill them with boldness.*** “And now, O Lord, hear their threats” (Acts 4:29, NLT). They knew it could get worse, and it did.<sup>11</sup>

Weeks later, Stephen would be the first martyr of the church. When he was dragged before the religious leaders, Acts 6 says, “his face was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15, ESV). Acts 6 says, Stephen was “full of the Holy Spirit, and gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, ‘I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ ... Then they rushed at him and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him ... And a great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem” (Acts 7:55-58, 8:1, NLT).

That kind of persecution did not just happen 2,000 years ago, it still happens today. Last summer, Islamic terrorists ravaged and burned the village of Komanda, Congo.<sup>12</sup> While they were worshiping, terrorists stormed a church with machetes killing 49 Christians and decapitating 9 children. Those who fled were chased down and hacked to death. One witness said, “The church is on the run. Christians snatching up their children and running for their lives.” With tears, another said, “There is sadness upon sadness everywhere.” Even worse in Nigeria, 3,490 Christians have been killed in the last twelve months.<sup>13</sup> Of course, this is extreme. It’s not happening in Lake Arrowhead, but it is happening in many parts of the world.

And it was happening to those first believers in Jerusalem. That’s why they cried out to God in prayer, “And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and **give us, your servants, boldness to speak your word**” (Acts 4:29, NLT). They prayed for “boldness” to go public with their faith.<sup>14</sup> They prayed for courage in the face of ridicule and threat. The application for us is that we would talk about Jesus as freely and boldly outside the church as we do inside the church.

The other thing they prayed for was God’s power. “Stretch out your hand with healing power, may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:30, NLT). God’s hand represents His power. They prayed for God to move in a way that would convince people that Jesus was the Son of God.<sup>15</sup>

In the face of ridicule and threat, they did not pray for comfort. They prayed for boldness to speak. They prayed for God to move. And Acts 5 records the answer to their prayer. “The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people ... and more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number” (Acts 5:14, NIV). God answered their prayer!

“After they prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31, NLT). Hear that again. “After they prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.” Imagine being there. God showed up. He shook the place. He shook their hearts. He answered their prayer and filled them with the Holy Spirit and with boldness. Oh, does our church look anything like their church?

Several years ago, when I pastored in Austin, seventy pastors gathered for a meeting called Christ Together. Christ Together was a prayer movement in the city of Austin. And when we got together, we prayed for the lostness of our city. At that prayer gathering that day we prayed Acts 4:31. We prayed for the Holy Spirit to fill us and to fill our churches. We prayed for the people in our churches to speak with boldness. It was a great day. And while we were praying, the room started shaking. Now it just so happened we were next to a construction site, where they were hammering rock. We all laughed, yet still took it as a sign that the Holy Spirit was with us!

Imagine that moment in Acts 4. Praying for the Holy Spirit to show up and the room starts shaking. That’s what the early church experienced when they prayed, and may we experience that when we pray.

## CONCLUSION

“All the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God ... After they prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:24, 31).

Their prayers revealed their priorities. And the same is true of us. We pray what’s important to us. Of course, it’s appropriate to pray for health issues and family issues and a thousand other problems we face. ***But when the church prays, the Gospel must take priority.*** To be aligned with the New Testament church, our focus, our priority, our prayers must be about the mission. As they faced increasing opposition, they did not pray for political revolution. They did not pray for comfort or protection or prosperity. They prayed for boldness to share the Gospel. So as we learn from them, may we pray as they prayed. Join me in praying the Acts 4 prayer.

*Father, our first century brothers and sisters addressed You as “Sovereign Lord” and “Creator of heaven and earth,” so do we. We bow in humility before You as our Lord, and may we pray with confidence trusting You as our loving Father.*

*Like our first century brothers and sisters, we believe Your plan will prevail. Therefore, we submit to Your will, and we count it a privilege to participate in what You are doing in the world and what You are doing in Lake Arrowhead.*

*And as our first century brothers and sisters prayed, we pray for boldness. Of course, we ask for help as we carry burdens, face illness, and encounter problems of every kind. But most of all, may the Gospel be our priority. We pray for those who do not know You. We pray for open doors for conversations. And we pray for boldness to speak. To tell others what Jesus has done for us and why we love Him so much.*

*And we pray for Your hand to be on us. How we long to see You move in our church, in our families, and in our community. Oh, may we see You move in our midst.*

*“All the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God ... And after they prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.”*

*As it happened then, may it happen now. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

## NOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> See also Acts 2:42, which says, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

<sup>2</sup> See Colossians 4:2, where Paul said, “Devote yourselves to prayer.”

<sup>3</sup> These prayers of the early church fathers found at [www.medium.org](http://www.medium.org).

<sup>4</sup> Acts 4:26, NIV.

<sup>5</sup> The NAS says “they raised their voices to God with one mind” (Acts 4:24). See also Philippians 2:2.

<sup>6</sup> Packer cites this illustration. [J. I. Packer, *Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), page 110]

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah said, “For the Lord, who created the heavens and who formed the earth ... says, ‘I am the Lord, and there is no other’” (Isaiah 45:18, ESV).

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the most definitive verse on the sovereignty of God is Psalm 115:3, which says, “God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.” See also Psalm 29:10.

<sup>9</sup> Both NLT and NIV.

<sup>10</sup> Or perhaps they remembered Isaiah saying, “What the Lord of hosts has planned, who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:27, NAS).

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps they remembered Jesus saying, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first” (John 15:18, NIV).

<sup>12</sup> Reported by Paul Tinsley, Fox News, 7/31/25.

<sup>13</sup> According to Open Doors.

<sup>14</sup> The Greek word for “boldness” used in Acts 4:29, 31 is *παρρησίας* (*parrasias*). It actually reads *πάσης παρρησίας*, meaning, with full, complete, or great boldness, confidence, and courage.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 11:21 has often been my prayer through the years, and says, “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number believed and turned to the Lord” (NAS).