

2016-04-10 Acts Power of Corporate Prayer

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Power of Unity
Acts 4:23–31

We are continuing our series on the Book of Acts today. The Book of Acts **describes** the events that **happened after Jesus' death and resurrection**. Acts describes what Jesus' disciples **did**, how the early Church **formed** and how the Gospel **spread**. As Pastor Kim said on the first Sunday of this series, the Acts is a book full of action and surprising events.

The beauty of Acts is that we see the early church going through some of the **same things** that **we go through today**. If we study Acts and the early Church, **it can lead us** to becoming full Christians in all of its beauty and **challenge**.

Last Sunday Kim spoke of the **AWE** that Jesus' disciples felt after the resurrection. You might remember Acts 2:43 – “**Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.**”ⁱ The **disciples acted in response** to their **AWE** by **going out** and proclaiming the Gospel. However, expressing their awe **caused challenges**. This week we learn what the disciples did in response to **challenges** and what we too should do.

Let me **set the stage**. In Chapter 3 it says that one-day Peter and John, two of the Apostles of Jesus, went up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. They met a man who was lame from birth and he asked them for money. Peter says in Acts 3:6-8

⁶ ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’ ... ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.”ⁱⁱ

The name of Jesus is powerful enough to heal physical ailments and this is one of many miracles that are recorded in the Book of Acts.

This healing, as well as and Peter and John's proclamation of the Gospel, **attracted the attention** of the authorities—the priests, captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees. They were **not happy** about what Peter was saying and Acts 4:3 “³ They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The authorities—high priest and others—gather to question Peter and John. They ask: “**By what power or what name did you do this?**” and Peter, [still] filled with the Holy Spirit, tells them—by the name of Jesus.

Having a cripple healed and walking around is hard to refute. The **officials command** John and Peter

“not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰ As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” ^{iv}

Now that the stage is set, let’s pick up in Acts 4:23

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to the other disciples and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ **When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.**”

The word translated ‘together’ in the Greek ὁμοθυμαδόν – is **literally** with one mind/purpose/impulse^v -- the disciples were unified. When they heard the testimony of Peter and John, **with one mind** they raised their voices in prayer to God.

The disciples’ prayer begins in v. 24. As we go through their prayer, notice that the disciples’ prayer follows the same general pattern of prayer that we have seen before.

[Slide] [I will not read the slide but cover the points on the slide]:

Structure of the disciple’s prayer

- **Acknowledge who God is**
- **Acknowledge Scripture as God’s word**
- **Scripture prophesized Jesus and His rejection (Psalm 2:25-26)**
- **God is in control**
- **Petition for boldness**

v. 24: “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “**you made** the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

[Notice that they begin by acknowledging who God is.]

²⁵ **You spoke** by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

[They acknowledge Scripture as the inspired word of God. They continue and quote the first two verses of Psalm 2:1-2]

“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
²⁶ The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together

against the Lord
and against his anointed one.”^{vi}

[By quoting Psalm 2, they acknowledge that God has a plan, it was foretold, and that Jesus is part of that plan.

Just to be sure that we get it, Luke, the author of Acts, rephrases Psalm 2 in light of the current situation.]

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. “

[**God is in control** here, not kings of the earth nor rulers of the people.

In v. 29 Now we get to the disciples’ request of God.]

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 signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

[The disciples saw the **threat** as against the spread of the Gospel. Not a physical threat against their person.]

[Slide]

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.
Acts 4:31

What were the **results** of this prayer? V. 31 says:

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**.^{vii}

The disciples’ prayer was answered. The disciples’ **unity**—their being of one mind—and their **boldness** would **shake** the heavenly bodies—and the high priest/authorities, and the temple, and Rome, and the **entire** world to this day.

Notice that they did **not** pray to be left alone, or for God to protect them. They prayed to be able to “Speak your word with great boldness.”

That can be **unlike** our prayers. In the past I have prayed for protection. Something like “Dear God, protect me from evil and all of those bad events out there and those mean people.” Based upon Acts 4, **I should be** praying something like “Dear God, give me boldness to speak

your Gospel everywhere I am whether in front of strangers or adversaries—bring on anyone who does not know Jesus!”

There is **another difference**. I might have prayed for the “**professionals**” to do my evangelism for me--“Dear Jesus, Help Pastor Kim or Staff talk to the new visitor I just saw and bring them to Jesus.”

If God brings someone to you or me, it **may be a gift** for us. The **Holy Spirit** could have led them to us. We may be **exactly** who that person needs to talk to. We may be the person to **ask** the stranger out to lunch and to get to know him/her better. We don’t have to be perfect, just ourselves, and willing to share our faith experience.

Remember, in the eyes of the early church there were **no professionals**, just disciples of Jesus. This is reflected in their prayer. The disciples didn’t thank God for the “professionals”—Peter and John—but prayed that **everyone** there would speak boldly. And v. 24 notes that “²⁴ **When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.**” Everyone prayed, not **just** the professionals. They were with one mind about this!

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Our Lesson:

- **Speak Together**
- **With Power**
- **With Expectation**

This is **Act’s lesson** for us. If we are to be all that God wants us to be we need to speak **together** and we need to speak with **power** and with **expectation!** **There is Power in our Unity.**

What do we need to do to act as the disciples did?

First we need to get beyond our individualistic culture. We are self-sufficient and tend to want to do things alone—at least I do. However, God does **not want us to be alone**. We need to give up our pride and join with each other.

Secondly we must become complete by uniting with other Christians as the Body of Christ:

Sören Kierkegaard describes how Jesus brings us into the church:

“Jesus does two things when he sees a crowd: The **first** is to disperse it and isolate each individual one-on-one with himself.

Having done that, the **second** thing he does is to reintroduce all these individuals to one another as brothers and sisters, making a crowd into a community. **A true Christian community** is always a community of prayer.”^{viii}

We must not stop at that first step and remain individuals. We must continue completely through the second step—entering into a true Christian community—a community that is always in prayer. **Jesus does not want us to walk alone in our faith.** Our unity with other believers is **Acts’ lesson** for us as individuals. Our unity is what changes us from a crowd of Christians into a community, a Church.

We see in Acts 4 that part of being in unity with others is praying together—corporate prayer.

Corporate prayer is **different** in some ways from personal prayer. **Ben Patterson**, Presbyterian Minister and author of *Deepening Your Conversation with God* expresses this:

“Good corporate prayer can demand more of us spiritually than individual prayer does. When I’m alone with God, I don’t have to deal with other people. Frankly, I like God a lot more than I like some people.

But the Lord is clear: **if we love him**, we must love others. Thus joining my heart with others **before the throne of his grace** is a **way of loving God.**”^{ix}

Patterson observes that “the same rules **that** apply to good conversation apply to good corporate prayer.”^x So **what are the rules** for good conversation?

[slide]

Rules for good conversation/corporate prayer:

- Listen
- Agree
- Add

Patterson writes:

“The method is to **listen**, really listen to a person’s prayer, and to let it **sink** into my mind and heart before I move onto my particular concerns. For instance, someone may pray for a family member’s health. As I **mull over** that prayer, I will **add a kind of amen** to it, **agreeing** with it, verbally or silently, thus entering more deeply into the concern.

Sometimes when I do that, I may find myself moved to **add my own prayer**, a nuance, to the prayer I heard. Others may do the same, **vectoring (shifting direction)** in their prayers and **building** on the original prayer.”^{xi}

Like a conversation, Corporate prayer evolves, builds, and changes course like a river flowing downstream. It is a conversation with God **directed** by the Holy Spirit. We do not know where our prayer will end up beside in the hands of God.

[pause]

Just as in conversation, one person should **not monopolize** corporate prayer. In corporate prayer you do not need to say **everything**. Patterson writes “Each should pray short prayers, many times in the course of a prayer session, thus **leaving space for everyone to agree** with, vector in (**shifting direction**), and build on the prayers of others.”^{xii} Even if you think that you are not a good prayer, the groups **needs** your insight and participation.

There also needs to be at least a **minimal amount of planning** such as agreeing that this is corporate prayer, that everyone is invited to pray, and who will close the session.

Corporate prayer is a **three-way conversation**, the person speaking, the person listening, and God. We need to give room to all parties in our conversation.

[pause]

A **good example** of corporate prayer was the **healing service** for Sheryl Pasquinelli that we had after the Maundy Thursday worship service. We invited people from the service to stay, we arranged chairs, we sang a hymn and then prayed, and repeated the singing and praying. Many people prayed. There was quiet. There was reaction to other’s prayers. It was corporate prayer.

We will be having more healing services. They will be on the fourth Sunday of the month—April 24th, May 22nd, and June 22nd etc, after the Sunday service. They will be centered around corporate prayer. Look for details coming in the future.

Another good example of unified community prayer was the **installation of Bob Harrison** at last week’s service. We gathered **together** to commission Bob, some of us gathered up front and as representatives of all of us **laid hands** upon Bob. His commissioning was from all of us, **including the children** next to him. We were in unity, **all of us** no matter our age. We were unified.

The disciples were unified. The Apostle John records that **this** is what Jesus prayed for. In **Chapter 17 of John's Gospel**, just before Jesus' arrest, Jesus prays for His glorification, Jesus prays for His disciples, and in **John 17:20–26** Jesus prays for all believers—including us—for our unity.

In conclusion, from Acts 4, we can see that our unity is a key component of spreading the Gospel. Jesus wants us to be in unity each other, and with Him as He is unified with the Father. With the power of this unity, how can we fail?

We must **practice** corporate prayer to achieve the full power of our unity. Corporate prayer is praying **with** each other, **listening** to each other, **adding** to each other's prayers, and **being** united with each other and with God. We can never practice this too much before our church meetings, before our small group meetings, before our family meetings. **Practice** listening, agreeing, and adding.

Let me close in prayer.

Dear Jesus,

We have seen Your glory and we are in AWE of it. You are one with the Father. You prayed for us to be **one** with You, one with the Father, and one with each other, **so that** we might be Your witness to the world. Jesus, **we turn our eyes upon You**. May our minds be one and our **souls** be joined together in praise of You. May our unity proclaim Your Gospel.

Amen.

Benediction

There will be people up front to pray for you, for your requests and for your joys and for your thanksgiving for answered prayer.

Psalm 133:1 says:

¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!^{xiii}

This expresses God's desire for us as believers and His blessing for our unity. It is not only about **God and me** but also about **God and us**.

Go forth this week and gather together, pray, listen, agree, and add to each other's prayers.

Pray for **boldness** to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Notes

- i *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 2:43.
- ii *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 3:6–8.
- iii *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 4:3.
- iv *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 4:18–20.
- v William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 706.
- vi See Psalm 2
- vii *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 4:31.
- viii Ben Patterson and David L. Goetz, *Deepening Your Conversation with God* (vol. 7; The Pastor’s Soul Series; Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 164.
- ix Ben Patterson and David L. Goetz, *Deepening Your Conversation with God* (vol. 7; The Pastor’s Soul Series; Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 168.
- x Ben Patterson and David L. Goetz, *Deepening Your Conversation with God* (vol. 7; The Pastor’s Soul Series; Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 168.
- xi Ben Patterson and David L. Goetz, *Deepening Your Conversation with God* (vol. 7; The Pastor’s Soul Series; Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 169.
- xii Ben Patterson and David L. Goetz, *Deepening Your Conversation with God* (vol. 7; The Pastor’s Soul Series; Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 170.
- xiii *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ps 133:1.