

“Pray”

GO: You Have What It Takes- Part 3

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Introduction:

Week 1: *Your most effective tool for evangelism is to be madly in love with Jesus.*

Week 2: *Words about Jesus will flow from our lips when worship of Jesus fills our hearts.*

Week 3: *Praying with fellow Christ-followers for those that do not yet know Jesus is a key to releasing God’s power for mission.*

Power for mission is released when God’s people

Acts 4:23-31

²³ 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. ²⁴ 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—²⁵ you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying,

‘Why were the nations so angry?

Why did they waste their time with futile plans?

²⁶ The kings of the earth prepared for battle;

the rulers gathered together

against the LORD

and against his Messiah.’^[e]

²⁷ “In fact, this has happened here in this very city! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. ²⁸ But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will. ²⁹ And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

³¹ After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

4 Traits Of “GO” Prayers

(4 Things You Need To See People Transformed Through Your Prayers)

1. Urgency (vs.23a)

(²³) As soon as they were freed... When Peter and John got out of prison, there was a definite sense of mission, purpose, and urgency. They had just come through a day of interrogation and a night of imprisonment at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders. I imagine they were scared and tired. Not too long ago, they had watched

these same leaders unjustly beat and crucify their leader, Jesus. They knew what these cowardly, jealous, and dishonest leaders were capable of.

Not only were their lives in danger, but I'm sure they were burdened with the question of how they were going to carry out the mission Jesus had given them to take His message to the uttermost parts of the world. The Jewish religious leaders had placed a gag order on them before they let them go. Acts 4:21 says, "...and when they had further threatened them, they let them go..."

Despite the threats of these religious leaders, Peter and John planned to move forward in obedience to Jesus' instructions...no matter what the authorities threatened. What did they do to move forward? How did they proceed? *They called a prayer meeting!*

Peter and John quickly moved to share their story and pray with their friends. They needed the companionship of their friends, boldness for their message, and power from God to move forward—NOW!

Prayer is powerful when there is a sense of urgency to it. ***When we see the mission as critical and prayer as essential to the mission...prayer becomes powerful.*** When reaching our friends and loved ones for Jesus is urgent...prayer is essential and becomes powerful. The power of missional prayer is multiplied when we join with others to beg God together for His movement in the lives of those He's placed around us.

Peter and John were committed to the mission of spreading the hope of Jesus to the world. This mission drove them to their knees with their friends. Prayer that rocks the world begins with a sense of urgency about accomplishing the work God has given us.

*Is there power in your prayer? In the group prayer meetings you're a part of? **If not, maybe your mission isn't clear...or other life priorities have covered over your most important calling—sharing the love and hope of Jesus with those around you.** For Peter and John, mission was the theme: people's souls hung in the balance, there were obstacles in the way, and they were afraid because their lives were in danger. Mission created an urgency that led to prayer that led to God working with great power!*

Warren Wiersbe writes:

Too often today, believers gather together 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. (Acts commentary, pg.418).

Illustration:

Application:

As soon as we have some faces in our head...of people we love that don't know Jesus...prayer moves from optional to essential. In this urgency is power.

If your prayer life is boring...snap some pictures of people you love. Stick them in your Bible. And, when its time to pray...pull these pictures out and wage spiritual battle for their souls. I promise you, you won't be bored. You're heart will come alive...

2. Unity (vs.23-24)

*²³ 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. ²⁴ When they heard the report, **all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer** to God...*

I'm impacted by how these men functioned under pressure and fear with their lives in danger. What did they do first? *As soon as they were freed...they found the other believers.* They didn't stop for a hamburger or attend to personal business. Their first priority...their first resource in a time of extreme need was their friends.

The NLT doesn't do this phrase justice. The word for "other believers" in the original text means "they went to their own *companions...*" Luke, the writer of Acts, is saying that Peter and John found some of their closest associates. Those they loved, those they trusted. This would have been a small group...maybe the disciples...of people who shared the same mission. They found this group of like-minded friends and told them what had happened.

When they heard it, the ESV says, "*They lifted their voices together to God...*". The NASB says, "*they lifted their voices to God with one accord...*" They were all united as they lifted their voices in prayer. This picture displays a unique kind of synergy...of power...that results from people that love each other and are united in the same eternal cause coming together for prayer. Notice Acts 4:32: *³²All the believers were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared everything they had.*

Unity is a key to powerful prayer. Peter and John had people to go to pray and ask for God's help. *Here, having a common purpose and right relationships with a group of people they loved paid huge dividends for Peter and John.* Emotional safety. Understanding smiles and hugs. Camaraderie. Energetic prayer. Rest from persecution. Benefits only derived from spending time seeking God with safe people.

Who do you pray with? Have you established a group of people that you turn to to pray for the forward movement of God's work on earth?

Illustration:

Early days at Columbia City- small church, smelly building, little resources...but a few dedicated people met every Sunday evening for prayer...and the main focus of that prayer meeting was always people that did not yet know Jesus.

Application:

- Pray with someone this week about your effectiveness as a missionary to your work-place, at the gym or pool, in your mom's group, or school.
- Call a prayer meeting in your neighborhood. How can you work together with other believers to reach those around you?

3. GOOD THEOLOGY (vv.24-27)

Peter and John turned to their Great Commission partners and they prayed together with missional urgency. At a time where circumstances could have driven them to give up...their faith led them to seek God for the boldness to persevere. **Here's a key thought: How they saw God prompted them to risk their lives for the sake of God's work.** We can learn from how they addressed God and what they said to Him. **The words of their prayer indicate the good theology that produced faith that pushed them forward through the obstacles they were facing.** Their faith was derived from good theology. 4 things they said indicate 4 things they believed:

▪ **They believed God was sovereign.**

(vs. 24b) *"O Sovereign Lord...",* The believers addressed God as *"Sovereign Lord."* The word here for "Lord" means "Master," or "ruler." By the title they used to address God, Peter and John and their cohorts were demonstrating that *they believed God was in control of the perilous circumstances they faced and superior to the power-hungry leaders that were watching their every move.*

For them, God being "Sovereign Lord" meant God was in control of the difficult circumstances they had just endured and the perilous future they faced. They viewed God as the author of a perfect plan...even if this plan involved suffering for them. They saw God as the ultimate power source- *the place to turn for boldness to carry out their mission and miracles to substantiate their message to skeptical audiences.* It's as if they were an unlit lamp and they're coming to God to plug in for power to light their community with Jesus' love.

▪ **They believed God was Creator.**

(24b) *...Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them...* They addressed God as Creator. Why was this significant?

- *Remembering God as Creator reminds us of God's unlimited power. **If God can create the world, He can help us change it through the message of Jesus.***

(Illustration: This week- leaves, full morning moon... God's creative beauty illustrates His masterful power over everything around us... TRUST HIM!)

- *Remembering God as Creator reminds us God knows and understands His creation. A creator knows his creation inside and out. He knows what it is capable of and what can destroy it. God was fully aware of the capabilities of evil leaders and the obstacles His servants were facing. He could hear their prayers, understand their weaknesses, and know how they needed help.*

Peter and John and their small group (in essence) were saying, *"God knows me best...I'm taking my desperate situation to Him. **God, you can create the hearts of men, You can help us change them.** God, since you understand our fear...You can help us move forward despite it.*

- **They believed God was true to His word.**

²⁵ *you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying,*

'Why were the nations so angry?

Why did they waste their time with futile plans?

²⁶ *The kings of the earth prepared for battle;*

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²⁷ *"In fact, **this has happened here in this very city!** For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed.*

As they prayed, these God-seekers drew strength from their belief that God had fulfilled Old Testament Scriptures right before their eyes.

Centuries before, in Psalm 2, David had written about the futility of nations and rulers positioning themselves against the Sovereign Lord and His Messiah (or Anointed One). These disciples communicated to God that they knew that Psalm 2 had been fulfilled right before their eyes. Within the last few months, they had witnessed the rulers of their day rising up against God's Anointed One- Jesus. They prayed, **"This is what happened here...for (rulers of our day) united against Jesus..."**

Why was this fulfilled prophecy like fuel in the disciples' evangelistic engines? Why was this significant to them...to us? *Because- if God can accomplish and stay true to His Word over hundreds of years...I can trust Him today.* From completed prophecy, we know God is true to His Word. **He said it would happen and it did.** He can be trusted. He is reliable. As the Psalmist said in Psalm 119:160 (ESV), *"The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever."*

If God can accomplish His Words over the course of centuries, surely He'll be true to His promises to me today.

▪ **They believed God had a perfect plan.**

(Current NLT) ²⁸ *But everything they did was determined beforehand according to your will.* (Older NLT) ²⁸ *In fact, everything they did occurred according to your eternal will and plan.*

What an amazing statement! The NASB says: “...to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose had predestined to occur...” Because they believed God’s Words from Psalm 2 had been fulfilled, they believed that the Jewish leaders had played right into God’s hand. Like David had said, “the peoples plotted in vain.” God did (ESV) what His hand and His plan had predestined to take place.

I can’t leave vs.28 without pointing out something obvious. God had worked out His perfect plan. *But, that perfect plan...that led to our opportunity for salvation through Jesus’ shed blood, involved great suffering on the part of our Savior. **God’s perfect plan**—for Jesus, for John and Peter as they were interrogated, threatened, and imprisoned, and for you and me—**involved suffering.***

To believe and follow God, it’s imperative to understand that even when things aren’t going how we’d like them to, or when there seem to be insurmountable obstacles blocking our mission, or when we’re being persecuted...everything is happening according to God’s eternal will and plan.

The Christ-followers in the prayer meeting of Acts 4 took comfort in this. They took comfort, and drew faith, and resolved to persevere...because the things they were enduring weren’t random, meaningless trials. Even if they didn’t know how at the time, they knew that the trials they endured...and those ahead were part of God’s plan. And, because they trusted God’s sovereignty, and God as Creator, and God as true to His Word, they were willing to trust His plan...even when it was hard.

Even after being persecuted...with grave challenges ahead...the Jesus-followers in that room prayed to God out of a strong faith developed through good theology.

Illustration:

Application:

- To see how God is true to His word- we have to KNOW His word.
- One of our biggest obstacles to going on mission is fear. What are we afraid of?
 - God is working out His perfect plan.
 - God understands our fears and the hearts of those we are sharing with.

- God is faithful even if the outcome is not what we would hope.

4. Miracles (vv.29-31)

²⁹ And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

³¹ After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

This is an ideal passage to draw these principles from, because the writer of Acts, Luke, allows us to see the miraculous answer to the prayer that was prayed. The building shook, the Holy Spirit was present in their hearts with renewed fervor, and the boldness they requested was given!

Maybe you're like me. The answers to my prayers don't always come so quickly, they don't always seem as powerful, and they're not always as visible. But, we can't miss the point here. Why did God show up in such a powerful way? One reason has to relate to what these men and women DID pray for and what they DIDN'T pray for.

Let's start with what they didn't pray for. They weren't there to question why God had allowed them to suffer, why God wasn't removing the ever-increasing obstacles they were facing, or asking God to protect them. If I were in that prayer meeting, it would be tempting to say, "*God, bring down fire from heaven and burn these guys up,*" or "*God, please protect us from future imprisonment...*" or "*God, show us how to get out of town and where we can go and preach in safety...*"

Here's what is so amazing to me about this passage. ***They weren't primarily concerned for their well being...they were concerned for God's Kingdom moving forward.*** Their prayer wasn't motivated by their own comfort...it was motivated by a passion to fulfill the mission Jesus had given them. It wasn't about them...it was about asking God for resources for their mission. This urgency pushed them to their knees and led them to cry out to God together.

So what did they pray for? They knew what they were doing was no illegal and would draw consequences that would lead to persecution and even death. With their real fear in mind, they asked for boldness to share God's message. Not only did they want boldness, they asked God to show up in big ways and authenticate His message with miracles, done through the name of Jesus. They desired to bring glory to Jesus through the living example of changed lives. This wasn't about their legacy...it was about Jesus' fame. It wasn't about protection for them; it was about God's power being displayed through them. Ultimately, they wanted to see many people drawn to Jesus as forgiver and leader of their lives.

So, they came to God with faith in His control of the universe, belief that He was aware of their situation, and expectation that He would release the resources they needed to complete their mission.

God works in supernatural ways through prayers that are motivated by desiring to see God's will done on earth...not ones that are motivated by trying to get my will done in heaven.

Who are you praying FOR? Who are you praying WITH for those you are praying FOR?