

Accessing the Power of God

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Preacher: Fred Stone

[0 : 00] If you have ever had a safe deposit box at a bank, you know that in order to access it, you've got to have two keys, the bank's key and your key.

Have you ever stopped and thought that there are two keys required to access the power of God? The first key is the Holy Spirit. God has given us the gift of His Spirit to empower us to live the Christian life the way that He intends, the way that He has worked in us to enable us, the way that He calls us and instructs us in His Word to live it.

Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher in the 1800s in England, he explains how dependent all of us are on the Holy Spirit. He says, without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing.

We are as ships without wind. We are useless. We need the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The second key to accessing the power of God is prayer.

God has given us the gift of prayer to access His power. The New Testament scholar D.A. Carson points out how the Apostle Paul stressed the importance of prayer as he wrote letters to many churches.

[1 : 28] Here's what he said. Paul recognizes that the true power for effective ministry and life transformation comes from God in response to prayer.

You know from your own experience that meaningful prayer doesn't always happen, even when we want it to.

It's not easy. In fact, a lot of times prayer is a struggle for most Christians. More often than we want to admit, when we pray, we feel distant from God, don't we?

We don't really always enjoy being close to Him, feeling close to Him. We feel powerless at times, even as we pray, over the sin habits in our lives, the sin nature, the sinful desires, the temptations that come our way.

We feel powerless instead of being confident. As Paul said, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

[2 : 45] Let's just be real honest about this matter of prayer. How often do we bow our heads and talk to God and we're really mostly concerned about getting things from Him than we are being in His presence and enjoying that time with Him as our Heavenly Father.

If you're tired of that, if you're tired of a joyless and meaningless spiritual life and prayer life, I've got good news for you today.

God wants to empower you. He wants to empower you with His Spirit. He wants you to access that power with prayer. And He wants to do this in such a way that you will bring glory to Him.

You will make a meaningful difference in the lives of the people you live with, work with, all people in your life. And God wants to revitalize you personally, spiritually as well.

Let's look at how God does this this morning. The first thing I want us to note is really a review.

Power for living the Christian life comes from the Holy Spirit. The only way that we can kill sin, get rid of it, eliminate it from our lives, and develop Christian character, and then effectively serve God as He calls us, is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 26] Now that's what we looked at two weeks ago. We spent the entire time looking at how God has given us His Spirit to live within us, to teach us, to equip us, to comfort us, to convict us, to empower us to live a Christian life.

So we're not going to go back to that today. What I want us to focus on this morning is point number two. Power for living the Christian life is most often accessed through prayer.

Power for living the Christian life is more often than not accessed through prayer. Now I want to be clear about this. God is not confined to working in our lives only in response to our prayers.

God is sovereign. God can do whatever He wants to do whenever He wants to do it. God is not enabled by anything we do.

God also is not limited by anything that we do not do. But there is a principle found in Scripture that God normally works in response to the prayers of His people.

[5 : 41] And I want us to look at one passage of Scripture that is a great example of God answering the prayers of His people in great power.

Read with me if you would from the book of Acts, chapter 4, verses 23 through 31. When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them. That's describing Peter and John. They had been preaching. People's lives had been changed. A man had been healed. People had been saved. Many people had been saved.

Well, the Jewish authorities hated that. The Jewish authorities arrested Peter and John. They threatened them. They tried to intimidate them. Then they let them go.

Peter and John, look at it again, verse 23. They went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them. And when they heard it, that is their friends, not just the other apostles, but Christians of all walks of life who were there with them, their friends.

[6 : 57] And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, why did the Gentiles rage and the people's plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. And that's a quote from Psalm 2.

But they understand that was a prophecy about Jesus. We continue on, verse 27. For truly in this city, there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal.

And signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. 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.

[8 : 37] That was powerful prayer that resulted in a powerful answer from God. Let's look at it. This passage reveals some of the characteristics of powerful prayer.

First, prayer should be focused on God. All of our prayers. A lot of times we're just thinking about ourselves, or we're just thinking about someone, or a certain situation, especially in a time of crisis. But all of our prayers need to be focused on God as theirs was in this case. These Christians were focused on God as they addressed Him as sovereign Lord in verse 24.

This describes a ruler, a ruler of unchallenged power, that idea of a sovereign Lord.

What they're doing here is they're acknowledging God's absolute power and authority over everyone and everything, including those religious leaders who had threatened them, who had told them they could no longer preach in the name of Jesus.

[9 : 49] Addressing God in prayer like this, it honored God, and that's the number one goal. But it also, when we address God like this, when we honor Him like this, it helps us to keep what's going on around us in perspective.

No matter what's going on, we have an audience with Almighty God when we pray. He is really and truly sovereign. He is in control. They also, as they prayed, acknowledged some aspects of His sovereignty.

I want you to note with me, they pointed out how God created all things in verse 24. They pointed out how God controls all things in verses 25 through 27.

When they quoted that Old Testament prophecy that was pointing to Jesus, then they talked about how it was fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus. But note again, in verse 26, everything happened according to God's predetermined plan.

It says to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. No matter what, God's in control. Even when people are doing things to hurt you, as they were these apostles, God is at work.

[11:10] God is going to use it in some way for His glory, for your good, for other people's good. It may be hard. There may be suffering involved.

We've got to trust our sovereign God. He didn't just create everything. He continues to control everything. There's one other thing they pointed out. God has a purpose for everything. We see that again in verse 28. Now, what I want us to think about is we look at how they are praying, how they address God, how they rehearse who God is, what God has and is doing. They know God personally. They're not just speaking words. There is no formality here. They are having a conversation with their holy God, sovereign God, their heavenly Father. Now, I want you to think. Do your prayers reveal that when you talk to God, it's a personal relationship?

[12:21] There's personal fellowship going on. You know, many people who write about prayer emphasize that the primary purpose of prayer is to have fellowship with God, to enjoy being in His presence.

Professor from Southeastern Seminary, John Hammett, he describes it like this. Prayer is not exclusively or primarily about getting things from God.

It is about enjoying and growing in intimacy and fellowship with God. D.A. Carson, effective prayer is the fruit of a relationship with God, not a technique for acquiring His blessings.

So let's think about it. Is your prayer time, is your being with God, with your head bowed, eyes closed, or driving down the road, just talking to Him, is your prayer time more about being with God, enjoying Him, having a conversation with Him, or is your prayer time times mostly about getting things from Him?

Our greatest need in life and in prayer is to know God better, to be able to draw close to Him in real fellowship. Our real need is to know Him and love Him more and more every day, to understand His purpose, to understand His will as revealed in Scripture.

[14:03] Everything about our Christian lives, everything about prayer, flows out of our personal relationship with God. Now, how do we do that?

How do we develop this kind of relationship with God? How do we draw close to Him and know Him? Well, it's no secret. God has given us two primary ways to develop a relationship with Him. Prayer and Bible study. The Christians in Acts 4 that we're reading about, they had a real relationship with God that they had developed by spending time with Him in prayer and by studying His Word.

For them, it was just the Old Testament. Their prayer, look at it again, their prayer shows they know a lot about God. And they learned it.

They didn't even have scrolls. They didn't have their own Bible. They learned it from hearing. They learned from being taught the Old Testament Scriptures. They knew a lot about God.

[15:18] And more important, or just as important, it is just as important, they knew God personally because they'd spent time with Him, talking to Him, listening to Him as they pray, as they listen to His Word.

What do your prayers reveal along this line? Do your prayers reveal that you know a good bit about God that's come from your study of His Word personally, in church, wherever?

Does your prayer life reveal a knowledge of God that you have gained through the study of His Word? And then, does your prayer life indicate that you do know Him personally?

If people overhear you praying, where are they going to come away thinking, you're having a conversation with someone you know, your Heavenly Father?

John Piper describes what's going on here in Acts chapter 4 like this. He says, it is remarkable that these Christians take five verses to tell God who He is and two verses to ask what they want from Him.

[16:38] Now, God does not need to be told who He is, but Christians need to know who He is, and precisely in their prayers, they need to know and confess that He is the kind of God who can and will answer their prayers.

In essence, what they are doing in verses 24 through 28 is hallowing God's name before they pray, Thy kingdom come. These Christians are praying as Jesus taught them.

They're praying the model prayer, as we sometimes say, the Lord's prayer. Their focus is on God, on His kingdom, and on His will. If we're serious about wanting to experience God's presence and God's power as we pray, we've got to learn to pray like this.

Prayer should be focused on God personally. But that's not all. Prayer should be focused on God's purposes as well. We see that in verses 29 and 30.

I want you to note in verse 29, as they pray, they've just come from those Jewish officials who have threatened them, intimidated them.

[17 : 54] You cannot preach anymore, threatening them with bodily harm. They do not come and pray and say, Lord, rescue us, deliver us.

Look at what they say. They said, look upon their threats. What's going on?

They come together, they're praying, and instead of saying, Lord, you get them. Look what they did to us, your servants. They just said, look upon their threats.

Now let me say, it would not have been wrong for them to have asked God to deliver them, to spare them from suffering. Paul did that at times. Nothing wrong with it.

But for some reason, that's not what they asked for. Maybe what they're doing in this statement, look upon their requests. Maybe as they are focusing on the fact that God is sovereign, they're just going to trust Him.

[18 : 56] They're just going to rest in God doing what's best in their situation to accomplish His purpose.

Now, they did make requests of God. Look next. They asked God to enable them to be bold witnesses. Verse 29, And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant, Jesus.

Notice what they prayed for. Not safety, but they prayed for the power and ability to boldly, effectively preach the word of God, preach the gospel.

Think about that. They were living under difficult times, tough circumstances, but they did not pray for easier circumstances. What they're actually praying for is the ability to be faithful in the midst of those difficult circumstances.

Are your requests similar to that? Or, if you're honest, are most of your requests to God to make your life easier?

[20 : 22] to make your life less painful? Are most of your prayer requests basically selfish? Think about it.

Many years ago, a young lady wanted to talk to me about her job situation. As we were going to get together and talk, I thought of her as a very mature Christian young woman.

She had been involved in college and campus ministries, leading Bible studies and things of this nature. She had been involved, was involved in the life of the church, involved in teaching women's studies.

When we got together, she told me that she was working in an office with two other women who were not Christians. They were very worldly.

She said that the way they talked, the way they acted made her feel terribly uncomfortable. But they didn't mistreat her. They didn't abuse her. It was just the way they were.

[21 : 29] It was just who they are. And they were fine with her. But their ungodly lifestyle just made her feel very, very uncomfortable.

She didn't like working there. She asked me, what do you think? Well, I tried to encourage her that God had her there for a purpose. I pointed out, you know, they're not doing, saying anything to you. They're treating you fine. I encouraged her. Think about it. God has you, a mature, committed Christian, there in that little office with two unbelieving women.

He wants you to be a witness to them. And just the way you live, the way you interact with them. And he, if I think he'll be faithful, prayerful, careful, look for opportunities.

He may even give you the opportunity to share the gospel with them, probably one at a time. She seemed to be okay with that. We prayed that God would give her the ability to relate well to them and be a faithful witness before them and look for the opportunity to share the gospel with them.

[22 : 47] Well, you know what happened? A few weeks later, she just quit. She just quit. And her response was, I just felt so uncomfortable being in that office with those unbelieving women.

The truth was, she was more concerned with being comfortable than with being faithful.

She was more concerned with personal comfort, being at ease where she worked, than she was being used by God to be a faithful witness to two women who may not have had anyone else in their life to shine the light of Jesus Christ.

What about you? Are your prayers more about seeking your will or God's will? It's certainly not wrong to pray for things like your health, your job, things going on at school.

If we are parents, grandparents, we pray for our children's success in many areas of life, academically, athletically, with music, things of this nature.

[24 : 10] Those things are part of a healthy Christian's prayer life. But what's the focus? What's the top priority when it comes to your prayer life?

Jesus taught us, be more concerned with God than ourselves. Be more concerned about His will than our own will.

And that's what we see here in Acts 4 that these Christians were doing. We need to pray more for God to empower us to develop Christian character, to be able to overcome sinful habits, to resist temptation, to be faithful witnesses.

Those are some of the priorities that every Christian needs to have in prayer. We also need to make requests like this for the other people in our lives that we pray for, including our children, including those who are closest to us.

What do you pray for your children? Is it just that they be healthy? That they do well in school? That they not get into trouble? That they make friends?

[25 : 27] That they make the right friends? That they do well in sports or whatever they're interested in? What do you pray the most about when it comes to praying for your children?

How often do you really pray as they're growing up for their salvation? For God to work in their lives to help them to have an awareness of their sin, their need for a Savior?

How much are you talking to them about Jesus, who He is, what He's done for us, how He can save us? If your children are Christians, your grandchildren are Christians, do you pray that they would develop Christ-like character, that they would be concerned about living a godly life and pleasing God more than anything else?

The way we pray, our actions reveal just what we consider most important in our lives and in the lives of the people we pray for.

Now, accessing God's power in our lives, it involves prayer that's primarily focused on God and God's purposes.

[26 : 47] And that's the kind of prayer that we can expect God to answer in a powerful way. Let's look at the next point. Prayer is answered with God's power in verse 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.

Now, note how God answered their prayers. The place where they were praying was shaken. It could have been an earthquake. It could have been something like powerful thunder.

I felt our house shake at times in some of these terrible storms over the years. There was some kind of supernatural event that took place to let these Christians know that God is heard and God is answering the prayer.

He is with them in a powerful, supernatural kind of way. But look also, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to speak the Word of God with boldness.

[27 : 51] that's what they were praying for and God answered that prayer. The point that I want to make here is that God answers prayers according to His purpose.

God answers prayers. Prayers prayed according to His purpose. So just think about it. Is God answering my prayers?

Now keep in mind that we talk about God answering prayers He does more than just answer our prayers yes. Sometimes God, His answer to the most godly Christian, the most humble request is no.

The Apostle Paul is probably the best example of that. Paul had a problem that he referred to as a thorn in his flesh. It may have been some kind of physical problem.

Some people think he may have had malaria, may have had eyesight trouble as a result of that. He prayed that God would remove that thorn from his flesh. He asked God to do that three times he tells us in 2 Corinthians chapter 12.

[29 : 01] But God's answer was a direct no. And God's explanation was in 2 Corinthians 12 my grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.

God wanted to use Paul in a powerful way with whatever that was that made him weaker.

That was God's plan. That was how God was going to use Paul and Paul accepted that. Paul even goes on to talk about glorying in the fact that God would use him in such a way. Sometimes God answers our prayers no. Sometimes though God answers our prayer wait not now. It may be the times not right.

It may be that you're not right. It may be the circumstances may not be right. So when we talk about God answering prayers sometimes he answers our prayer yes. Sometimes he answers no.

[30 : 05] Sometimes he answers wait. As Christians we can trust our Heavenly Father he knows what's best in our life and he's going to so work to accomplish what will be best in terms of our serving his purpose doing what he has called us designed us intend for us to do.

You know Jesus made it clear in one of his teachings that God really does like enjoy answering his people's prayers. This is found in Matthew chapter 7 beginning in verse 9 Jesus said which of you if his son asks for bread will give him a stone or if he asks for a fish will give him a snake if you then though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him God desires to give God desires to bless His children what we need to learn is to pray in a way that shows we honor God that we're more concerned about Him than His blessings you know when we look at the prayers of Christians in the Bible we see that they often they pray differently than we do they were focused more on God than they were themselves they had a relationship with God that just comes out in the way they talk to Him the way they interact with Him in prayer when we look at their prayers not just Acts 4 but many prayers in the New Testament these people are focused on serving

God's purpose not their own if we want to be people who experience power as we pray experience powerful answers from God we need to learn to pray like Jesus taught us in Matthew chapter 6 the Lord's prayer the model prayer and the way that these Christians in Acts 4 model for us the right way to pray I want to encourage you make a commitment to spend time with God every day in prayer and as you do don't think about forms and formalities think of your prayer time as talking to God as fellowship with Him communion with Him as a conversation with Him make your prayer more God centered than self centered read the prayer of Jesus in Matthew 6 the model prayer to see the priorities that ought to be in our prayers seek God's glory first always seek God's purposes before your own it's important to pray about everything in our lives don't hear this prayer this sermon and think

I'm talking about we should never ask God for anything we should but in the proper time our focus is on God knowing Him drawing close to Him having fellowship with Him seeking His will seeking to please Him and with that mindset that heart He's going to help us to know what we should ask for what we don't need to ask for He'll help us to pray more accurate prayers prayers prayers that we can expect real answers to you know some people have found it helpful to use the acrostic acts A-C-T-S to help them to guide them in their prayers A stands for adoration we begin our prayer time praising God worshiping Him loving Him see His confession as we draw into God's presence as we realize His holiness and purity we're going to be made aware of our sin we're going to be convicted of sin and we need to confess it be honest with God adoration confession thanksgiving we have much to thank God for every day at the top of the list is the life

He has given us in Christ the forgiveness of our sins last adoration confession thanksgiving and supplication that's making your request to God talking to Him about needs in your life needs in other people's lives I want to encourage you make time to pray personally make time to pray with your family you may feel uncomfortable doing that it just takes practice and if you feel uncomfortable right now get your family together and pray the Lord's prayer together read it from Matthew chapter 6 but get together with your family talk to God together talk about God together pray together read His Word together final thought what we saw a while ago from D.A.

[35 : 41] Carson listen effective prayer prayer is the fruit of a relationship with God not a technique for acquiring His blessings make your prayers conversations with God enjoy being with God in prayer would you bow with me Father work in every one of us to give us a desire to experience the kind of prayer we've been looking at this morning give us Father a desire to know you better to draw closer to you to feel your presence and your love to be able to call you Father and know that we are your children Father I pray that you'll convict us of our failure to pray and convict us of our sins of just praying selfish prayers just reading off lists to you to the neglect of enjoying being with you

Lord I pray that you'll help each person to make sure that there's a time every day that they set aside for you make an appointment with you to just be before you to talk to you to listen to you with

an open Bible an open heart in Jesus name we pray Amen church Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen