



# The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V28 N10 March 8, 2026

## POWER AND PURPOSE

“Power through Prayer”

Acts 4:23-31

### THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

#### Prayer

I pray to God to know him, to lay my requests before him, and to find direction for my daily life.

*“But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!”*

Psalm 66:19-20



How are believers to respond to persecution?

Following the detention of Peter and John and their appearance before the Sanhedrin, the apostles returned to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had told them—namely, not to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus (4:18). The report prompted their fellow believers to pray, “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 [by the apostles] through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (Ac 4:29-30). Understood in its context, it’s neither a prayer contemporary believers *could* pray if they *would*—the apostles are no longer around—nor a prayer they *would* pray if they *could*—other concerns eclipse the desire for boldness. Personal observation suggests that people express concerns for the following in prayer: individual guidance, physical health, personal relationships, career employment, intercession for others, and Christian mission. These are the kinds of things people pray about today.

The observation raises the following question: Are these the same kinds of things that the early Christians prayed about in the book of Acts? The terms “pray,” “prayed,” “prayer,” and “praying” occur roughly 34 times in the book. This is enough to suggest that the book of Acts portrays the early church as a praying community. One search suggests that 19 prayers are specifically recorded in the book: 1) while waiting for the Spirit (1:12-14); 2) for guidance choosing Matthias, (1:24-25); 3) the Pentecost context of prayer (2:42); 4) implied for the healing of a lame man (3:1, 6); 5) after persecution (4:24-30); 6) at the appointment of the seven (6:6); 7) Stephen’s prayers (7:59-60); 8) for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit (8:14-17); 9) reference to Paul praying (9:11); 10) Peter’s prayer before raising Tabitha (9:40); 11) Cornelius’s prayer and vision (10:1-4, 30-31); 12) Peter’s trance while praying (10:9); 13) the church’s prayer for Peter in prison (12:5, 12); 14) prayer and fasting at Antioch (13:2-3); 15) at the appointment of elders (14:23);

16) by riverside at Philippi (16:13); 17) prayer of Paul and Silas in prison (16:25); 18) farewell prayer with Ephesian elders (20:36); 19) prayer with disciples at Tyre (21:5-6). The early Christians prayed: in preparation for major events; for guidance in decision-making; for empowerment for mission; in response to persecution; as a means of receiving revelation; in a context of miracles; and as an expression of communal unity. The kinds of things they prayed for were quite different, perhaps as a result of their unique historical situation.

Only four clearly *verbatim* prayers are recorded by Luke. Acts preserves the actual wording of only the following: 1) the prayer for Matthias (1:24-25), “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place” —a prayer for guidance; 2) a corporate prayer for boldness (4:29-30), “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;” 3) Stephen’s prayer to Jesus (7:59), “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” and 4) his prayer for forgiveness of his executioners (7:60), “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

So while there are many *general* references to prayer in the book of Acts, there are fewer records of *specific* prayers, and even fewer of *verbatim* prayers, making it difficult to determine exactly what early Christians prayed for. But it appears that their prayers do not touch on the concerns contemporary Christians generally bring to God in prayer. The few *verbatim* prayers Luke gives appear to be concerned primarily with mission. Our prayers seem to be shaped more by Philippians 4:6—“do not be anxious about anything, but in *everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”—than by the example of believers in the book of Acts.

**Read Acts 4:23-31**

23 When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 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, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

"Why did the Gentiles rage,  
and the peoples plot in vain?

26 The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers were gathered together,  
against the Lord and against his Anointed' –

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, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 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.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "they" in v. 23.
- Circle "their friends" in v. 23.
- Circle "voices" in v. 24
- Circle "Sovereign Lord" in v. 24.
- Circle "servant" in vv. 25, 27 and "servants in v. 29.
- Bracket "by the Holy Spirit" in v. 25.
- In the margin next to vv. 25-26 write "Ps 2:1-2."
- Highlight v. 27.
- Circle "predestined" in v. 28.
- Circle "boldness" in v. 29.
- Underline "signs and wonders" in v. 30.
- Circle "shaken" in v. 31.
- Bracket "filled with the Holy Spirit" in v. 31.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about \_\_\_\_\_."



## DIG DEEPER

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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. *Who* was released, *where* did they go, *what* did they report and to *whom*?
2. Describe the immediate response of those who heard the report.
3. Those who heard the report quoted an Old Testament Psalm (vv. 25b-26) – *which* psalm, by *whom*, regarding *whom*?
4. What was said in this psalm “through the mouth” of the psalmist was said “by the Holy Spirit” (v. 25). Explain what this implies about the Bible.
5. Those who heard the report quoted this psalm because they believed Jesus had experienced what the psalmist described. How so? (See v. 27.)
6. Explain what God’s *hand and plan* had predestined to take place (v. 28).
7. Identify the request that those who prayed brought to God.
8. Explain what readers are to make of the fact that the place where they prayed “was shaken.”
9. Explain the connection between “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” and they “continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”
10. **Discussion:** This passage is about the believers’ response to persecution. Talk about their response and its application today.

### Commentary On The Text

The climax to the long narrative that began in 3:1 is found in Acts 4:23-31, which also contains the verbatim prayer of the believers following the release of Peter and John by the Sanhedrin (4:1-22). Verse 23 provides the setting of the prayer; verses 24-31 contain the prayer itself. The one paragraph in the ESV can be divided into two parts. In the first (vv. 24-28), the believers acknowledge that opposition to the LORD's Anointed, namely, Jesus—and by implication his followers—is exactly what God “predestined to take place.” Consequently, it should come as no surprise; it is the will of God for them. One commentator writes: “The early believers also recognize that their rejection was something to be anticipated, and they accept it with praise” (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 202). In the second (vv. 29-31), they ask God to allow them to continue speaking his word “with all boldness,” while “signs and wonders” continue to be performed through the name of his “holy servant Jesus.” On their request for boldness, the same author writes: “They pray to be able to preach the message boldly, not to cower in fear of the social and political power the leaders possess but to be faithful to God, who is the true Sovereign, following Jesus’s instruction in Luke 12:4-7” (Bock 202).

Part one (vv. 24-28) opens with a quote from Psalm 2 with a declaration that what was spoken by David was spoken “by the Holy Spirit”—a clear affirmation of inspiration (cf. 2Pe 1:21; 2Ti 3:16)—and that what was spoken by David applied to Jesus. The psalmist spoke of those who would set themselves against the LORD's Anointed, whom the believers understood to be Jesus. They understood the psalm to contain references to contemporary authorities, who posed continuing threats. According to one commentator: “In the community’s prayer the reference to the threat of enemies is given in the form of a scriptural proof. The scripture is in the exact Septuagintal rendering of Ps 2:1-2 and is presented as a prophecy spoken by God through David under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit . . . The nations represented the Gentile rulers and their cohorts, the soldier who executed Jesus. The people of Israel were those who plotted in vain. Herod represents the ‘kings of the earth’; Pilate, the ‘rulers’; and Christ, the ‘anointed’ of God . . . All the plotting against God’s anointed is in vain because God has already predetermined the outcome (cf. 2:23; 3:18)” (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 149). (When it comes to foreknowledge

and foreordination, what God *foreknows* he *foreordains*, and what he *foreordains* he *foreknows*.)

The authorities had raged against Jesus, and yet God made him triumph over them by raising him from the dead. Now the same authorities raged against the apostles and Jesus followers; they realized that opposition from Jesus’ opponents had not ended. The Sanhedrin continued to threaten them. “One would expect them to ask God for further deliverance. They did not” (Polhill, 150).

Part two (vv. 29-31) begins where part one leaves off. Instead, of asking for deliverance, they asked God, in their words: “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” (vv. 29-30). Another commentator surmises: “The disciples were to witness for Christ (1:8; Matt. 28:19-20). Consequently they only needed divine enablement to carry out their task. They did not assume that God would automatically give them the courage to witness boldly, as He had done in the past. They voiced a fresh appeal for this grace, since additional opposition and temptations lay ahead of them (cf. Mark 9:29). They also acknowledged that God, not they, was doing a spiritual work. In these respects their prayer is a helpful model for us” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Acts,” 2026 ed., 118, [soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf](http://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf)).

The Lord was evidently pleased with their prayer and demonstrated as much by shaking the place where they were gathered and by filling all of them with the Holy Spirit. And consequently, they “continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (v. 31). This was not another Pentecost, not a second baptism with the Spirit (1:5, 8; 2:1-4) but a fresh filling. In the words of the same commentator: “The same control by the Spirit that had characterized Peter (v. 8) and the disciples earlier (2:4) now also marked these Christians. They now spoke with “boldness” (Gr. *parresias*, with confidence, forthrightly; cf. v. 13, 29) as witnesses, as Peter had done” (Constable, 119).

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## Word Studies/Notes

v. 23 *they* “Peter and John returned to their fellow Christians and reported the Sanhedrin’s injunction against preaching the gospel” (*The ESV Study Bible*, note on Ac 4:23-31). The lame man would also have been free to go (cf. 4:10).

v. 23 *their friends* Lit., “their own.” “Many interpreters see this as referring only to the other apostles, viewing vv. 24-30 as the apostles’ prayer for boldness in their witness” (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 148). But it more likely refers to their fellow Christians. “The expression is not accidental, as it presses the point of how the early church saw itself as a community of mutually supportive friends” (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 203).

v. 24 *voices* Lit., “voice” (sing.). “One person probably prays here with the whole community sharing in the spirit and nature of the request” (Bock, 203-204). Or perhaps they followed the Jewish liturgical practice of “using a leader who prayed a phrase at a time, with the others repeating phrase by phrase” (Polhill, 148).

v. 24 *Sovereign Lord* Gk. *despota*, Eng. “despot;” cf. “Master of all” (NET). “The cognate English word ‘despot’ conveys the idea of absolute authority, but the Greek word does not have the negative connotation of the English term . . . It is God’s position as Creator that allows him to function as Master over his creatures. There is a corporate humility expressed in turning to the Master” (Bock, 204). “God was addressed as ‘Sovereign Lord,’ a common designation for God in the Old Testament and appropriate to this gathering of Jewish Christians” (Polhill, 148).

vv. 25, 27, 29 *servant/s* “The believers contrasted God’s position as sovereign with that of His servants: David (v. 25), Jesus (vv. 27, 30), and themselves (v. 29). The Greek word translated “servant” (*pais*), used of David (v. 25) and Jesus (v. 27), contrasts appropriately with the word rendered “bondservants” (*doulos*), used of the disciples (v. 29)” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Acts,” 2026 ed., 117, [soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf](http://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/acts.pdf)).

v. 25 *by the Holy Spirit* Cf. 2Pe 1:21; 2Ti 3:16. “The words **by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of . . . David** point up, as do many passages, the divine inspiration of Scripture through human agents (cf. 28:25)” (Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 364).

vv. 25-26 **Ps 2:1-2** “Most likely originally relating to God’s triumph over Israel’s enemies through the anointed king, the Christians came to see it as in a real sense prophetic of Christ. All the details of these first

verses of the psalm were applicable to the passion of Christ” (Polhill, 149).

v. 27 *Herod and . . .* “David’s references to ‘the nations’ [‘Gentiles,’ ESV], ‘the peoples,’ ‘the kings,’ and ‘the rulers’ (vv. 25-26) applied to the Roman ‘Gentiles,’ ‘the peoples of Israel,’ ‘Herod,’ and ‘Pontius Pilate’ (v. 27). However the believers again saw God’s sovereign hand (the ultimate effective cause) behind human actions (the secondary instrumental cause, v. 28; cf. 2:23a; 3:18)” (Constable, 118).

v. 28 *predestined* Cf. “decided beforehand” (NET, NIV); “determined beforehand” (NLT); “foreordained to happen” (WEB). “Once again the attribution of fault to the Jewish and Gentile authorities is balanced by the assertion that what happened was fully in accord with God’s own predetermined counsel and action” (James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 57). “Not that God had compelled them to act as they did, but he willed to use them and their freely chosen acts to accomplish his saving purpose (see 2:23)” (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on Ac 4:28).

v. 29 *boldness* “First, they pray, neither for judgment on those who are persecuting them nor to avoid persecution but for their own strength and enablement in the midst of persecution. Second, they pray to be able to preach the message *boldly*, not to cower in fear of the social and political power the leaders possess but to be faithful to God, who is the true Sovereign, following Jesus’s instruction in Luke 12:4-7” (Bock, 202, italics added).

v. 30 *signs and wonders* “The church appeals to God both for the power to speak the word *boldly* and for the continuation of the *signs and wonders through Jesus’ name* (4:29-30). The importance attributed to the healed lame man as a sign of Jesus’ saving power, a sign recognizable even by outsiders and opponents, suggest why signs and wonders have an important role in strengthening a mission under pressure” (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke – Acts*, vol 2, *The Acts of the apostles*, 63).

v. 31 *shaken* “With the prayer complete, three signs of divine response follow: (1) the place where they pray shakes, (2) all are filled with the Spirit, and (3) the speak the word with boldness” (Bock, 209). The exact nature of the shaking is unspecified.

v. 31 *filled with the Spirit* “This was not a ‘second Pentecost.’ They had already received the Spirit . . . It was a fresh filling, a renewed awareness of the Spirit’s power and presence in their life and witness” (Polhill, 150). This is a separate act from the indwelling that appeared in Acts 2” (Bock, 210).

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## APPLY THE TEXT

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### CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THIS PASSAGE

Recognizing that opposition to Jesus appears in every generation, believers are to pray for the courage and the boldness to proclaim the gospel regardless.

### CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



### 3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



## PARENT CONNECTION

It's Thursday afternoon. You grab the kids from school and on your way home you get an earful about the terrible injustices done to your daughter throughout the day. The mean teacher took away recess because she offered a pencil to her neighbor when they weren't supposed to talk. Her "best friend" turned against her and she's convinced the entire friend group was talking about her behind her back. And she left her homework at home and now will get a reduced late grade. Ugh! It was a rotten day. So, what do you do? Our first instinct is to fix it. We'll call the school, reach out to parents, double and triple check that "we" have everything before leaving the house. We'll take control and make it all better. But what will that teach our kids? Let's take a parenting lesson from our passage today. After Peter and John were released from jail, the first thing they did was run straight to their community of believers. Help your kids understand there is strength in biblical community. Next, they sought the Lord by turning to Scripture. Ask your child what the Bible has to say about discipline, friendship or personal responsibility. Lastly, they acknowledged God's sovereignty and authority through prayer. Lead your child in earnest prayer for God's help to follow His will and His way. Next time your kids experience a hardship, resist the urge to fix the problem or ease the burden. Instead, lead them to community, scripture and prayer. Help them ask for boldness to endure with grace, not for the problem to go away. We're praying for you!

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read Acts 4:23-31.

1. What did Peter and John do when they were released?
2. According to verse 27, who was against Jesus?
3. What did the believers ask God to grant them?

### What Do You Think?

Why was it important that the place shook?

### What Do You Do?

Each night, pray around the dinner table and shake the table when you're done.

### CORE COMPETENCY: Prayer

I talk to God so I can know Him, ask Him for things and find out what He wants me to do.

### MEMORY VERSE: Luke 6:45

*"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."*

## KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: [kids@wearecentral.org](mailto:kids@wearecentral.org)

- I completed my Bible Study
- I memorized this week's verse
- I brought my Bible to church
- I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

# OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

## CENTRAL BELIEFS

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)  
*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

**Church** (Ephesians 4:15-16)

*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

**Eternity** (John 14:1-4)

*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

**The Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:9)

*I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.*

**Humanity** (John 3:16)

*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)

*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

**Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-4)

*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.*

**Life Purpose** (Acts 20:24)

*I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.*

**Personal God** (Psalm 121:1-2)

*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*



## CENTRAL VIRTUES

**Love** (1 John 4:10-12)

*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

**Joy** (John 15:11)

*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)

*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

**Patience** (Proverbs 14:29)

*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others*

**Faithfulness** (Proverbs 3:3-4)

*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

**Gentleness** (Philippians 4:5)

*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

**Self-Control** (Titus 2:11-13)

*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

**Grace** (Colossians 3:13)

*I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.*

**Hope** (1 Peter 1:3-5)

*I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.*

**Humility** (Philippians 2:3-4)

*I choose to esteem others above myself.*



## CENTRAL PRACTICES

**Bible Study** (Hebrews 4:12)

*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)

*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

**Compassion** (Psalm 82:3-4)

*I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.*

**Disciple-Making** (2 Timothy 2:2)

*I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.*

**Evangelism** (Acts 1:8)

*I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.*

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

*I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.*

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)

*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Single-Mindedness** (Matthew 6:33)

*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

**Spiritual Gifts** (Romans 12:4-6)

*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

**Worship** (Psalm 95:1-7)

*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

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**Stephanie Thomas** (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have five children: Elijah, Levi, Bo, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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**CENTRAL  
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**OUR MISSION**  
Making God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world.