

Heart of Worship, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: Prayer in the Life of the Church

Acts 4:23-31

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal matter in this lesson is the place of prayer in the worship and work of the church. Luke shows prayer not as a formality but as the church's lifeline: the first response to threat, the means of seeking God's power, the channel through which the Spirit filled them to speak boldly. The prayer itself models a theology of prayer worth teaching: it begins with God's sovereignty over all creation, it is saturated with Scripture, it submits the crisis to God's overruling hand, and it asks above all for boldness and the advance of the gospel rather than personal comfort.

Help your class see what is at stake. A church can keep the form of prayer while losing its substance, reciting words at the edges of its gatherings while functioning, in practice, as though everything depended on its own effort. This passage calls the church back to genuine dependence on God, expressed in real, expectant, Scripture-shaped prayer. Present prayer positively, not as one more duty but as the privilege and power of a people who know that the work is God's and that he hears.

The lesson is also deeply formational. Most of us pray mainly for comfort and relief, and there is nothing wrong with bringing our needs to God. But this prayer stretches us toward something larger: praying for boldness, for fruitfulness, for the spread of the word, for God to act in power. The aim is that your students grow into bolder, more God-centered, more Scripture-filled prayer, both privately and as part of the praying church, and that they recover prayer as the first instinct rather than the last resort.

Question 1

Student Question:

The church begins its prayer by addressing God as "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth" (v. 24), before mentioning any threat. Why do they start with who God is rather than with their problem, and what does this teach us about how to pray in a crisis?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the order of the prayer. Before a word about the threat, the church addresses God as Sovereign Lord, Maker of heaven and earth. They steady themselves on the truth of who God is before they ever name what they fear.

Explain why this matters in a crisis. Fear shrinks our view of God and magnifies the threat. By beginning with God's sovereignty and power as Creator, the church puts the threat in its proper proportion. The rulers who frightened them are creatures of the God they address.

Apply it to the class. Teach them to pray the same way: to begin not with the problem but with God, rehearsing his character and rule. This is not denial of the trouble but the placing of the trouble inside a bigger truth. It reorders the heart before the asking begins.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God addressed first as Sovereign Lord and Creator (Acts 4:24).
- The right ordering of prayer: God's character before our requests.
- A large view of God as the antidote to fear in prayer.
- Placing every crisis inside the truth of God's sovereign rule.

Discussion Prompts

- Why do the believers start with God rather than with their problem?
- How does a big view of God change the way we pray under pressure?
- What truths about God do you most need to rehearse before you ask?

Question 2

Student Question:

When trouble strikes, our prayers often begin and end with our fears. How would beginning your prayers, as the church did, by deliberately remembering who God is change the way you pray about the things that frighten you? Name one truth about God you most need to rehearse before you ask.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make this personal. Our crisis prayers often begin and end with the fear itself, circling the problem without ever lifting our eyes to God. The result is prayer that leaves us as anxious as it found us.

Teach the discipline of beginning with God. Encourage students to open their prayers, especially fearful ones, by deliberately naming who God is: his sovereignty, his goodness, his power, his faithfulness. This is not a formula but a reorientation of the heart.

Help them be specific. Ask each person to identify the one truth about God they most need to rehearse in the face of their current fear. Naming it, and beginning prayer there, can transform the whole prayer that follows.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tendency of fearful prayer to circle the problem.
- Beginning prayer with the character of God as a reorientation of the heart.
- The difference between venting fear and praying in faith.
- Rehearsing specific truths about God in the face of specific fears.

Discussion Prompts

- How do your prayers change when you begin with who God is?
- What truth about God do you most need before you bring your fears?
- What would it look like to reorder one anxious prayer this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

The believers turn to Scripture in their prayer, quoting Psalm 2 and seeing their situation through it (vv. 25–26). How does praying in line with God’s word shape and strengthen prayer, and what does it tell us that they understood their crisis through the lens of Scripture?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Highlight how Scripture saturates the prayer. The believers quote Psalm 2 and interpret their situation through it, seeing the raging of rulers against the Lord and his Anointed as something the psalm had already described.

Show what this does for prayer. Praying in line with Scripture anchors our requests in God’s revealed character and promises rather than in our own wishes. It teaches us what to ask and gives us confidence that we are praying according to God’s will.

Encourage the practice. A church and a Christian steeped in the word will pray differently, with more truth, more boldness, and more alignment with God’s purposes. Praying the Scriptures back to God is one of the surest ways to pray well.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Prayer saturated with and shaped by Scripture (Acts 4:25–26).
- Understanding our circumstances through the lens of God’s word.
- Scripture teaching us what to ask and grounding our confidence.
- Praying the word back to God as a path to faithful prayer.

Discussion Prompts

- How does praying in line with Scripture strengthen prayer?
- What does it tell us that they read their crisis through Psalm 2?
- How could you let the word shape your prayers more deeply?

Question 4

Student Question:

The early church let the Scriptures supply the words and the perspective for their prayer. How full is your own prayer life of the language and promises of God's word, and what is one way you could let Scripture shape your prayers more deeply?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn the previous truth inward. Ask students how full their own prayers are of the language, promises, and perspective of Scripture, as opposed to mere repetition of wants and worries.

Encourage growth without guilt. Many have simply never been taught to pray the Scriptures. Suggest beginning with a psalm, or with a promise tied to a particular need, letting God's words supply the words.

Offer a concrete practice. Praying through a psalm, turning a passage from the day's reading into a prayer, or claiming a specific promise in a specific need, any of these can deepen a thin prayer life into one richly shaped by the word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The value of Scripture-filled prayer in the believer's life.
- Learning to let God's word supply the words of prayer.
- Praying the psalms and promises as a discipline.
- Growth in prayer through deeper immersion in Scripture.

Discussion Prompts

- How full is your praying of the language and promises of Scripture?
- What keeps your prayers from drawing on God's word more?
- What is one way you could pray the Scriptures this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

They recognized that even the rulers who opposed them were doing only "whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place" (vv. 27-28). How does confidence in God's sovereign rule, even over their enemies, free the church to pray boldly rather than fearfully?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Unfold their confidence in God's sovereignty. The believers acknowledge that Herod, Pilate, the nations, and the people did only what God's hand and plan had predestined to take place. Even the crucifixion of Jesus, the greatest evil ever done, fell within God's sovereign purpose to save.

Show how this frees prayer. If God overrules even the actions of his enemies, then a threatened church need not pray as cornered victims. They can pray boldly, knowing that no ruler can finally thwart the purposes of the God they serve.

Guard against misunderstanding. God's sovereignty over evil does not make him the author of sin or excuse the guilt of those who did it; the same passage holds them responsible. But it does mean that nothing escapes his rule, and that his people may therefore pray with confidence rather than fear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's sovereign rule even over the actions of his enemies (Acts 4:27–28).
- The crucifixion as both a wicked act and within God's saving plan.
- Sovereignty as the ground of bold, confident prayer.
- God's rule over evil without God being the author of sin.

Discussion Prompts

- How does God's sovereignty free the church to pray boldly?
- Why is it comforting that even opposition serves God's purposes?
- Where do you most need to trust God's hand over a hard situation?

Question 6

Student Question:

It is one thing to confess that God is sovereign and another to rest in it when you are afraid. Where do you most need to trust that God's hand is over a situation that feels out of control, and how might that trust change what you pray for?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make the truth of sovereignty personal. It is one thing to confess that God reigns and another to rest in it when we are afraid. This question invites students to bring their confession into their actual fears.

Help them locate the gap. Often we say God is in control while praying and living as if everything depends on us. Naming the specific situation where we struggle to trust is the first step toward genuine rest.

Show how trust reshapes requests. When we truly believe God's hand is over a situation, we stop praying only for control and escape and begin praying for faithfulness, boldness, and God's purposes to be done. Encourage one area where students will entrust the outcome to God this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between confessing sovereignty and resting in it.
- Bringing our actual fears under the truth of God's rule.
- Trust in God's sovereignty reshaping what we pray for.
- Entrusting outcomes to God rather than grasping for control.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you struggle to trust that God's hand is over a situation?
- What is the gap between confessing sovereignty and resting in it?
- How would real trust change what you ask God for?

Question 7

Student Question:

When they finally make their request, they ask not for safety but for boldness to keep speaking the word (vv. 29–30). What does it reveal about the priorities of this church that they prized courage and the spread of the gospel above their own comfort and security?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw out the stunning request. Given a chance to ask for anything, a threatened church asks for boldness to keep speaking the very word that got them arrested. They prize courage and the gospel's advance above their own safety.

Show what this reveals about their priorities. Their deepest concern was not self-preservation but faithfulness, not comfort but the spread of the word and the glory of Jesus' name. The kingdom mattered more to them than their own ease.

Hold it up as a model. This is a church whose desires have been reordered by the gospel. They want the right things, and so they pray for the right things. Let the class feel both the challenge and the beauty of praying like this.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church's request for boldness rather than safety (Acts 4:29–30).
- Gospel-shaped priorities that prize faithfulness over comfort.
- The advance of the word valued above personal security.
- Reordered desires producing reordered prayers.

Discussion Prompts

- What does their request reveal about what they treasured most?
- Why is it striking that they prayed for boldness, not safety?
- What would it mean for our desires to be reordered like theirs?

Question 8

Student Question:

Much of our praying is aimed at our own comfort, safety, and relief. If you compared your recent prayers to this one, what would the comparison reveal about your priorities, and how might you begin praying more for boldness, fruitfulness, and the advance of God's work?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn the mirror toward the class. Much of our praying centers on comfort, safety, and relief. There is nothing wrong with bringing such needs to God, but if that is all our prayer ever is, our priorities may be smaller than the gospel.

Invite honest comparison. Ask students to set their recent prayers beside this one. What would the comparison reveal? Not to induce guilt, but to enlarge their praying toward boldness, fruitfulness, and the work of God.

Offer a concrete step. Encourage each person to add to their prayers this week a request for boldness in witness, for the advance of the gospel, or for God to work through their church, alongside their prayers for personal needs.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tendency to pray mainly for personal comfort and relief.
- Bringing our needs to God while enlarging our priorities.
- Praying for boldness, fruitfulness, and the advance of the gospel.
- The shape of our prayers as a window into our priorities.

Discussion Prompts

- What would comparing your prayers to this one reveal?
- How might you begin praying more for boldness and God's work?
- What keeps your prayers focused mainly on comfort?

Question 9

Student Question:

This scene shows prayer at the very center of the church's life: not a ritual at the margins, but the means by which a threatened church found courage, sought God's power, and was filled with the Spirit to speak the word boldly (v. 31). What does this teach us about the place prayer is meant to hold in the worship and work of the Lord's church, and why must we resist letting prayer shrink into a mere formality while still expecting God to work? How does this passage call a congregation to depend on God in prayer for everything it does?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, so let it land with weight. Luke shows prayer not as a decorative formality but as the very center of the church's life. When threatened, the church did not strategize first; it prayed. When it needed power, it sought God. And the result was tangible: the place was shaken, the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word with boldness (v. 31).

Teach the place prayer is meant to hold. The church of the New Testament was a praying church, devoted steadfastly to prayer (Acts 2:42), depending on God for boldness, for fruit, for everything. Prayer was the engine of the church's worship and work, not an afterthought. A congregation that prays little, whatever else it has, has cut itself off from its source of power.

Warn against the subtle danger. It is possible to keep the outward form of prayer, opening and closing meetings with words, while functioning as though success depended on our planning, programs, and effort. Such prayer has shrunk into formality. The passage calls the church to genuine, expectant dependence on God, the kind that actually believes he hears and acts.

Frame this positively as a call to dependence. The lesson is not mainly a rebuke but an invitation: to bring everything the church does, its worship, its decisions, its mission, its trials, to God in real prayer, trusting him to supply what we cannot. Help your class long to be part of a church that prays like the church in Acts, and to expect God to work when his people seek him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Prayer as the center of the church's life and work, not a formality (Acts 4:23–31).
- The early church's steadfast devotion to prayer (Acts 2:42).
- Genuine dependence on God versus mere outward form in prayer.
- God acting in power in response to the church's prayer (Acts 4:31).
- The call to bring all the church's worship and work to God in prayer.
- Expectant faith that God hears and answers his praying people.

Discussion Prompts

- What place is prayer meant to hold in the worship and work of the church?
- How can prayer shrink into formality while we still expect God to work?
- What would it look like for our congregation to pray like the church in Acts?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole prayer: a sovereign God, the word of Scripture, confidence under threat, a cry for boldness, and a Spirit-filled church speaking the word. Name one specific way

this scene is reshaping your understanding of prayer, and one concrete step you will take this week to make prayer more central in your own walk and in your part of the church's life.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather the scene: a sovereign God, the word of Scripture, confidence under threat, a cry for boldness, and a Spirit-filled church speaking the word. Ask students what has most reshaped their understanding of prayer through this passage.

Press for one concrete step. For some it is to make prayer the first response rather than the last; for others, to pray more from Scripture; for others, to pray bolder, more God-centered prayers; for others, to invest in the praying life of their congregation.

End by lifting their eyes to the God who still hears. The same Lord who shook that room and filled that church still answers the prayers of his people. Encourage the class to pray expectantly, both alone and with the body, trusting that the work is his and that he delights to act when his people seek him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The elements of faithful prayer drawn together from the passage.
- The call to make prayer central in personal and congregational life.
- Confidence that God still hears and answers his people.
- The movement from understanding prayer to practicing it.

Discussion Prompts

- What has most reshaped your view of prayer in this lesson?
- What one step will you take to make prayer more central this week?
- How does it encourage you that God still answers his praying church?