

This is Us: Praying Church
Acts 4:23-35
Small Group Discussion Guide

OPENING QUESTION (get everyone involved in discussion): In the spirit of Thanksgiving, take a few moments to share with the group something you are particularly thankful for this year.

TRANSITION: We're in the fourth week of our series, "This is Us." We're thinking about the question, who are we as the people of Jesus? What are the crucial markers of our identity as his people? And over the last few weeks we've seen three answers to this question.

- We saw the first week the one, major task or mission that God has given us to carry out is to **be disciples who make disciples**.
- And we saw next that we do that by **being a people who serve**, who give ourselves to things that are bigger than us;
- And last week that we also carry out our mission by **caring for people the same way Jesus cares for us**.
- Today we are going to learn that the engine that powers mission is prayer. We accomplish what God has asked of us in the face of life's harsh realities by **being a praying people**.

PRAYER INVENTORY: On a scale of 1-10 below (with 10 being high), how powerful do you feel like your prayer life is?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Dull Butter Knife			Steak Knife		Hand Saw		Sharp Axe		Chain Saw

BACKGROUND TO TODAY'S PASSAGE: When we drop in, in Ch. 4, the apostles Peter and John have just been imprisoned, tried, released, and threatened. The officials have warned them that if they continue to speak about Jesus, they will face grave consequences. Our passage picks up right after their release.

READ ACTS 4:23-25

- After Peter and John made the report of their arrest and threats received, the group immediately joined together in prayer.
 - Should this example be a rule, a guideline, or was it only a practice for crisis circumstances?
 - What do you think should be the balance between prayer and planning? Prayer and action? Prayer and analysis/rumination?
- Josh says there are **three traits of prayer that powers mission** in this passage. What traits of prayer did YOU see in this passage? Discuss.
- Josh's first trait is that **there is power in group (corporate) prayer**.
 - Read the verse below and discuss: Why is prayer more powerful in a group (even a small one) than just individually?

Jesus said, "truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven" (Matt 18.19).
 - How have you used the following resources of group prayer: spouse or family member; small group; Prayer Team after the service; close Christian friends; Prayer Meeting on Tuesday nights (7:00-8:00pm); or phoning a friend for a quick prayer? (Any other resources you can think of?)

- Josh states (and vv25 and 31 show) that the Holy Spirit is very connected to prayer, at times speaking through us to each other.
 - How sensitive do you feel you are to the Holy Spirit?
 - Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit moving in a time of group prayer?
 - What can deepen this sensitivity?
- The second trait is, **prayer that powers is Word-centered prayer**, or prayer that interacts with what God has spoken to us through his word, the Scriptures.
 - Re-read Acts 4:24. Why do you think they started with acknowledging God's sovereignty? How does this help facilitate power in prayer?
 - Re-read Acts 4:25. How does this quote from Psalm 2 apply to the threat they are under? How does this help facilitate power in prayer?
 - Re-read Acts 4:17-28. How does acknowledging that God's will was accomplished in Jesus despite the seeming victory of the officials over Jesus apply to their current situation? How does this help facilitate power in prayer?
 - In general, how does making our prayers a response to our relationship with God and centered on the truth of his word help facilitate power in prayer? What might this look like in some situation you are currently facing?
 - What do your prayers look like? God and Word-centered or me-centered? Be honest!
- The third trait is **prayer that powers is mission-focused prayer**.
 - Read verses 29-30. What do they pray for? What don't they pray for (given the death threats that they have just received)?
 - Is there anything in your life currently by which you feel threatened, or of which you feel fearful? How can we pray for you? What would mission-focused prayer be in this situation?
 - The greatest mission we have been given is making disciples: helping people to know that Jesus died for their sins, loves them, and wants to be in a relationship with them, and helping them grow in that relationship. How often do we pray for others to know Jesus? Who are two people you can ask everyone else to join you in praying for?
 - Many ministries at TVC facilitate our mission of making disciples, for example, Alpha, 631, etc. Which ones are you involved in and how can our group pray for them? Let's pray for these in a moment.
 - In verse 31, see how God's power in the form of the Holy Spirit came on them. Let's pray right now for more of the Spirit's power in our lives "to make disciples of all nations."

Have you ever seen God answer a specific prayer? Was it in the way you expected?

What are some things you could do to increase the amount of corporate prayer in your life?

Do you feel that we are a praying church? Are we fully tapping into this power?

PRAYER: Share with one another some of your current needs, and pray for one another in the manner we have discussed.