

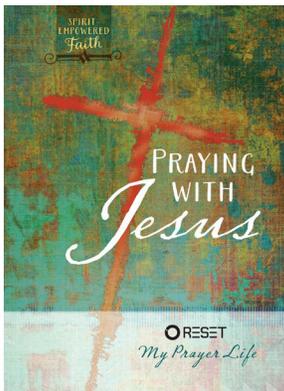


# Pray Like It Matters

This article is written by **Steve Gaines** from *Praying With Jesus*.

A growing number of Christians today are aware that something must be wrong. They know there has to be “more” to the Christian life than what they have experienced. “More” is found through the discipline of prayer. When we begin to pray like Jesus and His early followers, then we will witness the power they experienced.

When I read the book of Acts, I am embarrassed. Why does our brand of Christianity look so insipid compared to the believers of the first century? Where has the power gone? Has God changed, or have we? We’ve all heard the cop-out, “The book of Acts represents a different dispensation.” What a sad, self-serving attempt to excuse our current state of spiritual impotence!



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When we read Acts, we should yearn to experience a return to their brand of Christianity. Yet, instead of copying them, we seem content with copying other modern churches that are “growing.” But why copy a copy, when you can copy the original (the book of Acts)? In Acts, God was saving people every day. Communities were transformed. People were healed. Demons were cast out. Miracles were commonplace. Churches sprouted up across the Roman Empire. Persecution was faced and overcome. What made them so different?

Our lack of spiritual power in Christianity today is not due to the sermons we preach or the songs we sing. Rather, it is due to our lack of prayer. We do not pray like it matters. Jesus and His earliest followers prayed like it was important. We pray like it is inconvenient or inconsequential. Prayer was their priority. It is our postscript. We plan more than we pray. The Christians of the early church prayed more than they planned. We gather to minister to one another. They gathered to minister to the Lord in prayer and fasting. Our focus is earthly, horizontal. Theirs was heavenly, vertical.





- L2. Listening to and hearing God for direction and discernment



- P1. Living a Spirit-led life of doing good in all of life—relationships and vocation, community and calling (including the calling to spread the Gospel)

### LEARN to encounter Jesus.

Many of us know what it means to minister for the Lord, but how many of us know how to minister to the Lord? Acts 13:2 tells us that the first disciples ministered “to the Lord” (NKJV). What does it mean to minister to Jesus? It means to serve Him, to love Him, to have a vertical focus of priority in relationship with Him. What a different motive for prayer. It’s not just something that we should do, it’s a part of how we love the Lord!

Pause and allow the Holy Spirit to bring an image of Jesus to your mind and heart. Imagine the scene: Jesus is sitting at the home of His friends, Mary and Martha. He has just experienced rejection in the Samaritan village but has rejoiced over the good reports from the 70 who were sent out (Luke 9:51–56; Luke 10:1–22). Imagine how Mary senses the Savior’s sadness about Jerusalem, as well as His celebration for those 70 disciples. Notice Mary. Where is she? She sits at Jesus’ feet—listening to Him. Mary is loving Jesus, ministering to Him. We’re shocked to hear Martha’s interruption, but also startled by Christ’s clear words of affirmation: “Mary has chosen what is better” (Luke 10:42 NIV).

Now imagine that you have the same opportunity to minister to Jesus. In truth, you do! You have this same opportunity to love Him, serve Him, and minister to Him in prayer!

He is waiting. He has taken a seat in your home. Sit quietly with a reverent heart. Do not speak at first; just listen. The Savior longs to share His heart. Wait before Him. Listen for His words of pleasure: “*You have chosen well.*”

Now allow the Spirit within you to commune with the Savior. Talk to Him in prayer, but make these moments a two-way conversation. Listen to Him. Wait for His response. Then tell Him the concerns of your heart.

### SHARE with others in community.

Spend a few moments in quiet reflection. Ask the Lord to show you a person who could benefit from hearing what God is doing in your life. Who might need to hear about the truth that prayer is one of the best ways to minister to Jesus? Your story might begin with these words:

*Jesus is doing some amazing things in my life...*

*I'd love to share how prayer has changed me...*

Every prayer we pray is significant. Through our prayers, God changes things. One life dedicated to prayer can do more good than any life dedicated to other so-called “noble,” worldly causes. An individual follower of Jesus who is committed to prayer is a fountain of life in a world of death. Likewise, the local church that becomes a house of prayer will be a spiritual powerhouse from which God’s mighty miracles will flow exponentially. Prayer is what modern Christians and churches are missing—frequent, fervent, faithful prayer!





## The Power of Praying Fervently

Churches today should resemble the churches mentioned in the book of Acts. When we read Acts and then analyze our twenty-first-century churches, we are forced to ask, “Where is the power of God?” Indeed, why do we see so few people being saved? Why aren’t more people healed physically? Why don’t we experience demons being cast out of people? Why aren’t entire cities coming to Christ as they burn their pagan paraphernalia like the new Christians did in the city of Ephesus (Acts 19)? Why aren’t modern-day Christians “turning their world upside down” (Acts 17:6) with the gospel?

Read these wonderful words: “Peter was in prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God” (Acts 12:5). Appreciate the contrast intended by the writer: “Peter was in prison, but prayer...” (emphasis mine). The prayers prayed for Peter were far from being casual or routine. Instead, they were urgent, desperate, and fervent prayers. The Greek word translated “fervently” in Acts 12:5 is *ektenos*. It means to pray “eagerly; fervently; constantly.” Fervent prayers rise from a boiling, passionate heart that pleads with God and must have an answer! It’s the kind of prayer Jacob offered when he wrestled with the Angel of the Lord. “I will not let you go unless you bless me” (Genesis 32:26). God loves it when His children pray with such fervency!

The fact is, Jesus prayed with fervency. When He was in the garden of Gethsemane, just before He was arrested, Luke tells us, “And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:44). Jesus poured out His heart in passionate, fervent prayer to His Father, just like His followers did later in Acts 12 on behalf of Peter. The Father answered Jesus, and He also answered those who interceded for Peter. What could happen if we prayed fervently?



- L8. Disciplined, bold, and believing prayer

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### PRAY and experience Scripture.

What about you? What concern of your life could benefit from your fervent prayer? What issue needs your eager and constant prayer?

James 5:16 tells us that “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (NKJV). Prayer accomplishes things! So here is your chance to pray earnestly. Minister to Jesus in these next moments; bring to Him the deepest concerns of your heart. Ask Jesus for a miracle or a dramatic conversion and trust Him to accomplish it.

*Jesus, the issue that concerns my heart right now is...*

*I need to sit at Your feet because...*

*Speak to me about this. I am listening.*

