



# DETOURS

OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL  
ROADBLOCKS IN  
MINISTRY

## Devotion #2 - Prayer Changes Things Acts 4:23-31

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February 2021

When we step into the place of prayer, it is often to ask the Lord to change circumstances. We pray for healing for someone who is sick, comfort for someone who is grieving and for the Lord to change the heart of someone who is walking away from God's kingdom. Prayer changes things, and the Lord is able to move in people's lives and circumstances because we pray.

The leaders looked for people who were described as being full of the Holy Spirit. They found Stephen who is described as being "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5)

But prayer does not just change a situation. It will also change who we are so that the Lord can use us to be his change agents in this world. God's word is a double-edged sword, and it works on us just as much as on the situation we are praying for.

It can merely be the Holy Spirit's action, giving us a more profound love for the person we are praying for. But it can be a more profound effect. In Acts 4, Peter and John had been in prison because they had been speaking about Jesus. The religious leaders threatened them and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Once the leaders released Peter and John, these apostles gathered with the believers to report on what had happened and then they moved into a time of prayer. They prayed about the persecution and discrimination they faced. You would think that the focus of their prayers would be to stop the persecution and to protect themselves from future imprisonment. But instead, they prayed that they, not the religious leaders, would be changed.

*Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. (Acts 4:29)*

The believers pray for great boldness to be able to speak. They ask the Lord to perform signs and wonders and for them to have opportunities to talk about Jesus.





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### Rest Stop

- What is the role of prayer in your diaconate?
- How have you seen God move in big ways; in your life, your diaconate, and/or your church?

The religious leaders were intentionally seeking to limit the believers' ability to talk about Jesus. They were effectively blocking the advancement of God's kingdom. They were seeking to stop the gospel message of freedom through Jesus Christ. But instead of praying for the blockages to be removed and for things to be easy, the believers prayed for the boldness to speak and witness about Jesus, even amid difficulties and persecution.

Their prayers were not "Change this bad situation, Lord," but "Change us, so that we can be effective in this situation!" How many times do we pray, asking the Lord to make things easy for us, instead of praying for the strength, wisdom and empowerment to go through challenging or difficult circumstances?

God heard and answered their prayer in such a tangible way that the building was shaken. The believers were filled with the Spirit and spoke boldly. They still faced persecution and jail time (Acts 5:18), but the Holy Spirit empowered them to deal with those situations. The Lord changed the situation by empowering the believers to speak boldly about Jesus, and the result was that the gospel message spread and many of the Jews put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Messiah. 

Prayer changes things, and often the first thing that needs to be changed is our hearts.



### Rest Stop

- What challenging circumstances do you face today?
- Are there places you want the Lord to step into and change?
- Spend some time in prayer, asking the Lord about how he may want to change you to become the change agent for the situation.

*"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."  
(2 Corinthians 5:17)*

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### The Scenic Route

(optional)

"It is not so important what happens to us; it is more important what happens **in** us."

**Pick a day this week and read through Psalm 51, a psalm of David.** This Psalm was written after Nathan, the prophet, came to David revealing his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband (see II Samuel 12:1-13).

**After reading, reflect on the following questions.**

- What was David's prayer? What was he asking of God?
- What did he recognize was needed in himself for God to work?
- What does he request of God in vs. 13-17? What outcome does he hope for?

David did not ask for a change in his circumstances but cried out "Lord, change me!" He prayed for a clean heart and a right spirit. David asked God to change him and clean him up so that he could be a blessing to others.

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