

From Texting to Praying

CONNECTED #4 - Pastor Gary Combs - August 9, 2026 - Acts 4:23-31

INTRO: Good morning church! Today we're concluding our series entitled: "CONNECTED: Finding Real Community in a Digital World." Throughout this series, we've said that technology can help connect us, but it can never replace the kind of face-to-face fellowship that God created us for.

As the apostle John wrote:

2 John 12 (ESV) "Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete."

John was grateful for the ability to communicate through writing. But he knew that written communication could not replace being physically present with other believers face to face.

We've organized this series around the four devotions of the first church:

Series Theme: Acts 2:42 (ESV) And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the **prayers**.

They gathered around God's Word. They shared life as God's family. They ate together from house to house. And they devoted themselves to praying together.

NEED: We know how to communicate a prayer request. We can send a text, post it on social media, or add someone's name to a prayer list. But communicating a burden is not the same as carrying it together before God.

We need people who are more than informed. We need believers who will sit beside us, call upon God with us, remind us of His promises, and believe with us for His strength and help.

Some burdens become lighter when others help us carry them. Some fears begin to lose their grip when we hear another believer speak God's truth over us. Some trials require more than a prayer emoji. They call for the gathered people of God to lift their voices together.

ILL: We all want to know that someone will stand with us when life becomes hard. That desire is not limited to adults. Children feel it too. And one of the most popular family movie franchises is now asking whether technology can really satisfy that longing. It's called Toy Story 5.



It's about a little 8 year old girl named Bonnie who's having trouble making friends. Jessie and the other toys want to help her, but Bonnie's parents believe she may need what all the other children seem to have: a frog-shaped tablet named Lilypad.

Lilypad appears to solve Bonnie's problem. It connects her with girls from her dance class through an online platform called "The Pond." Bonnie is even invited to a sleepover.

But the digital connection does not become the real community Bonnie hoped for. The sleepover goes badly, and the same girls eventually make fun of her online. The device gives Bonnie access to people, but access is not the same as acceptance. Being included in a group chat is not the same as belonging to a group of true friends.

Trans: This is not merely a challenge in a children's story about toys. It is a picture of the world in which all of us now live. Texting a prayer request cannot replace believers gathering around us and lifting their voices to God. And that is what happened in Acts 4...

BODY: In the book of Acts, Luke described how after the Jewish leaders had arrested Peter and John and threatened them not to speak in the name of Jesus, they immediately gathered together with other believers to pray, and received Spirit-given boldness to continue proclaiming His Word. We can face life's trials and fulfill Christ's mission more boldly when we gather together in prayer. Why does praying together help us face life's trials and fulfill Christ's mission? The text gives **four reasons** why praying together helps us face trials and fulfill Christ's mission.

Read text: Acts 4:23-31 (ESV) 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.

PRAYING TOGETHER HELPS US FACE TRIALS AND FULFILL CHRIST'S MISSION...

1. Because it helps us lift our shared burdens to God's throne.

EXP: (23-24) Look at v23 "They went to their friends and reported." They shared their burdens. Then what did their friends do? v24: "They lifted their voices to together to God." They lifted them to God's throne!

"Friends" (23) (ἰδιος, *idios*) - pertaining to one's self, one's own, belonging to one's self. Fellow believers.

"Lifted their voices together" (24) (αἶρω, *airō*) - to raise up, elevate, lift up; together. Prayed together.

"Sovereign Lord" (24) (δεσπότης, *despotēs*) - an absolute ruler ("despot" in the positive sense); Lord.

"Who made" (24) (ποιέω, *poieō*) - to make, to be the authors of, the cause. God is King and Creator.

ARG: One of the primary ways we bear burdens is by praying for one another:

Galatians 6:2 (ESV) Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

We can approach God's throne together with confidence:

Hebrews 4:16 (ESV) Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

ILL: **Moving a piano.** You might look at one of those and think, "I can move that." And you'd be wrong. You better enlist a few friends for that task. Facing life you may be saying, "I got this." But you don't. Ask help.

APP: The Sanhedrin threatened the apostles, but they didn't occupy the throne. Before the church ever talked about the threats, they reminded themselves of who was on the throne. Burdens become lighter when lifted to the throne of God. Who do you pray out your burdens with? Who knows the deep places where you need the Lord and who do you draw near to the Lord with? Shared prayers overcome shared burdens.

2. Because it helps us see our circumstances from God's perspective.

EXP: (25-28) As they prayed to the Sovereign Creator, the Holy Spirit who inspired David, inspired them to remember and pray one of his psalms. This gave them God's perspective on their circumstances.

"Mouth of ... David" (25) - The Holy Spirit inspired the mouth of David to write Psalm 2:1-2.

"Gentiles rage" (25) (φρουάσσω, *phruassō*) - of horses: to neigh, stamp, snort; of men: to rage.

"Against his Anointed" (26) (Χριστός, *christos*) - "anointed," the Messiah, the Son of God

"Gathered together" (27) (συνάγω, *sunagō*) - to bring together, assemble. Synagogue of Satan.

Luke 23:12 (ESV) And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

"Against your holy servant Jesus" (27) (ἅγιον παῖδά, *hagion paida*) - holy child, holy son; servant

"Your hand and your plan" (28) - God was active in both the activity and the purpose of Christ's sacrifice.

"Predestined" (28) (προορίζω, *proorizō*) - to predetermine, decide beforehand; foreordain.

ARG: Not all things are good, but we can know that God is working for our good through all things:

Romans 8:28 (ESV) And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

ILL: **Flight over our city.** A few years ago Mike Laramie took me for a flight over our city. Everything looks different up there, things that seem big down here, look really small up there.

APP: Prayer may not change our circumstances immediately, but it can change how we see them. When we're disconnected from God's people, we often interpret our lives through our emotions or fears. But when we gather with God's people in prayer, we can remind one another of God's Word. Together we remember that God is still on the throne, Christ is still building His church, and no opposition can overturn His purposes.

3. Because it helps us align our requests with God's purpose.

EXP: (29-30) After gathering together to lift their burdens to God's throne, and getting God's perspective, they make their requests. But notice how their requests are in alignment with God's purpose for them.

"Look upon their threats" (29) (ἀπειλή, *apeilē*) - menace; threaten. Lord, you deal with the threats.

"Grant ... to speak your word" (29) (λαλέω, *laleō*) - to speak, to declare His word.

"With all boldness" (29) (παρρησία, *parrēsia*) - freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech; openly.

"Stretch out your hand to heal" (30) (ἐκτείνω, *ekteinō*) - to stretch out, stretch forth; extend, cast

"Signs and wonders" (30) (σημεῖον, *sēmeion*) - a sign or mark; by which God authenticates His men.

ARG: Jesus had taught them to align their requests with His Words, His purpose.

John 15:7-8 (ESV) If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

ILL: **Tuning Instruments.** You've probably noticed our worship team looking down and moving knobs in between songs. Prayer is spiritual tuning that aligns our hearts together on God's purpose.

APP: One of the greatest benefits of praying together is that it keeps a church "in tune" with the mission of Christ. Alone, we'll naturally pray only about our own needs. But gathered, we remind one another of the mission.

4. Because it helps us open our mouths with God's empowerment.

EXP: (31) Now we see God's response to their prayer meeting: shaken, filled, and empowered to speak the word of God with boldness!

"When they had prayed" (31) (δέομαι, *deomai*) - to ask, beg; to pray, make supplications

"Shaken" (31) (σαλεύω, *saleuō*) - a motion produced by winds, storms, waves; to agitate or shake. "This was now shaken with a rushing mighty wind, as on the day of Pentecost, and was a symbol of the divine presence, and a token that their prayers were heard." – *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*

"Filled with the Holy Spirit" (31) (πίμπλημι, *pimplēmi*) - to be filled, imbued, furnished.

"Continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (31) - they went on to do the very thing that they had requested of God. God filled them with His Spirit and emboldened them to continue.

ARG: Jesus taught His disciples to depend continually upon the Father's provision through the Spirit:

Acts 1:8 (ESV) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

ILL: **Recharge.** Every device we own has to be recharged. Phones. Watches. Earbuds. Laptops. We accept that without thinking. Yet somehow we expect to live the Christian life on yesterday's strength.

APP: Church, we have observed that on average, our families are only attending 35% of the time, that's only 18 Sundays a year. If the apostles needed to gather in prayer for fresh courage, how much more do we?

If we want to experience God shaking this place, our families, our church, our city, then we must make praying together a priority. We cannot accomplish Christ's mission without the Spirit's empowerment!

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CONCLUSION: Church, when Peter and John returned to their friends, they brought with them a burden that was too heavy to carry alone. So the believers gathered together and lifted it to the throne of God. As they prayed, God's Word gave them a new perspective. Their requests became aligned with God's purpose. Then God filled them with His Spirit and opened their mouths with boldness.

But we must remember that their confidence in prayer was not based on the quality of their praying. It was based on the finished work of Jesus.

The One they called God's "holy servant Jesus" had already faced the greatest gathering of opposition. He was rejected, condemned, and crucified. Yet even their rebellion could not overthrow God's saving plan.

At the cross, Jesus carried the burden we could never carry. He bore our sin, guilt, and judgment in His body. He entered the darkness alone so that those who trust in Him would never have to face life alone again. He rose from the grave, ascended to the Father, and poured out His Spirit upon His people.

That is why we can approach God's throne with confidence. We are not trying to persuade a distant God to care about us. Through Christ, we have already been brought near. We are not praying to earn God's favor. In Christ, we have already received grace. We are not gathering because our faith is always strong. We gather because we need brothers and sisters who will help us remember that Jesus is strong when we are weak.

So, what burden are you carrying alone today?

Who knows what you are really facing? Who is helping you carry it to the throne of grace? Who is reminding you of God's Word? Who is praying that you will remain faithful to Christ's purpose?

Do not settle for attending without anyone knowing your name. Open your life to the community Christ has given you. Gather faithfully with the church on Sundays. Become part of a Community Group where believers can know you, stand beside you, and lift their voices up to God with you.

And when someone shares a burden, let us move beyond saying, "I'll pray for you." Whenever possible, let us stop and say: "Let's pray together right now."

The same Jesus who saved us has given us one another. The same Father who welcomes us has opened His throne of grace. The same Spirit who filled the believers in Acts 4 still strengthens Christ's church today.

- 1) So let us lift up our burdens together to God's throne.
- 2) Let us see our circumstances from God's perspective.
- 3) Let us align our requests with God's purpose.
- 4) And let us trust the Holy Spirit to give us God's empowerment to speak His Word.

(Seeker) Perhaps you have never trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Your greatest need is not merely for better friendships or greater courage. Your greatest need is to be reconciled to God. Jesus died for your sins and rose again so that you might be forgiven, adopted into God's family, and given eternal life. Turn from your sin and place your faith in Him today.

(Believers) For those who know Christ, perhaps your response is to stop carrying life alone. Commit yourself again to Sunday worship. Join a Community Group. Tell another believer what you are facing. Ask someone to pray with you today.

Let us lift our voices up to the Lord now. Let's pray.