

Drawing a Circle

I. Introduction

- A. Rodney “Gypsy” Smith was born on the outskirts of London in 1860. At the age of sixteen, he made a decision for Christ and taught himself to read and write so he could start preaching the message of Jesus.
 - 1. Rodney would often sing hymns to people and earned the nickname “singing gypsy boy.” He began serving in missions organizations in England, including the Salvation Army.
 - 2. Rodney criss-crossed the Atlantic Ocean forty-five times, preaching the gospel to millions of people—and he never preached without someone surrendering their life to the lordship of Jesus Christ. It seemed as if everywhere he went, revival was right on his heels.
 - 3. Rodney issued a challenge to those who likewise wanted to see revival. He said, “Go home. Lock yourself in your room. Kneel down in the middle of the floor, and with a piece of chalk draw a circle around yourself. There, on your knees, pray fervently and brokenly that God would start a revival within that chalk circle.”
 - 4. Each of us is invited to take up this same challenge. Over the next five weeks, you will be invited into a forty-day challenge of bold, expectant, Bible-based, miracle-producing prayer.
- B. Be ready to participate right from the start.
 - 1. Make your small groups into prayer circles.
 - 2. Document the promises of God you are believing, the requests you are making, and the answers you are seeking.
 - 3. Get into God’s presence and receive His agenda for your life and for this church.
- C. In this sermon today, we will consider four dynamics of praying for forty days as we “draw the circle” and “keep circling” in prayer.

II. Teaching

- A. The promises of God energize prayer.
 1. God made an expansive promise to Joshua.
 - a. God said, “I will give you every place where you set your foot” (Joshua 1:3 NIV).
 - b. God had transferred this promise from Moses to Joshua: “As I promised Moses” (verse 3 NIV).
 - c. Joshua led God’s people to *circle* Jericho for seven days (see Joshua 6:15,20), and Jericho fell.
 2. God’s promises in the Bible are given to us (see 2 Corinthians 1:20).
 - a. All God promises are answered “Yes” and “Amen” in Christ.
 - b. We must pray God’s promises in God’s will and for God’s glory. This is not a name-it-and-claim it formula. God is not a genie in a bottle.
 3. Application:
 - a. Jim Lankford was not in politics. But when the congresswoman from his district decided to run for governor of Oklahoma, Jim felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to run for Congress.
 - b. Congressman Lankford practices circling prayer. Mark Batterson writes, “If you visit the Cannon House Office Building on any given morning when congress is in session, you’ll find a camp-director-turned-congressman circling the fifth floor, praying for his constituents, colleagues, and country.”
 - c. What promises of God are you asking Him to fulfill in your life?
- B. Praying for forty days has a purpose.
 1. The number forty isn’t magical, but it is biblical. The Bible records many instances of the number forty:
 - a. Flood waters came in Noah’s time for forty days and for forty nights (see Genesis 7:12).
 - b. Moses was in Midian for forty years before God called him to deliver Israel (see Acts 7:30).
 - c. Moses was on Mount Sinai with God for forty days and forty nights (see Exodus 24:18).

- d. Moses *prayed* for Israel for forty days and forty nights (see Deuteronomy 9:18).
 - e. The Israelite spies took forty days to investigate the land of Canaan (see Numbers 13:25).
 - f. The people then had to wander in the wilderness for forty years (see Deuteronomy 8:2).
 - g. Goliath taunted Saul’s army for forty days before David arrived and the scene (see 1 Samuel 17:16).
 - h. When Elijah fled from the Jezebel, he journeyed forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb (see 1 Kings 19:8).
 - i. Jesus spent forty days being tested by the devil in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:2).
 - j. Forty days passed between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension (see Acts 1:3).
2. The purpose of the forty-day prayer challenge is for each of us to create *the habit* of prayer.
- C. Persistent prayer demonstrates our passion to see God at work.
- 1. Jesus said (literally), “Keep on knocking, keep on seeking, keep on asking” (see Matthew 7:7).
 - 2. Jesus taught that what we ask for on earth according to God’s will shall be done (see Matthew 18:18).
 - a. The word *bind* in this verse is a legal term, a contractual term.
 - b. Prayer is the way that we put “contracts” on things in the spiritual realm.
 - 3. Application:
 - a. God will not answer 100% of the prayers you don’t pray.
 - b. What are you asking God for today?
 - c. What promises of God fire your imagination?
 - d. What would the *habit* of prayer look like in your life?
- D. Persistent prayer requires a place and a time.
- 1. Jesus directed us to a *place*: “go into to your room” (Matthew 6:6 NIV).
 - a. We need a place where we regularly go for prayer.

- b. We also need to consistently go to our place of prayer.
 - 2. The Jewish people and the early believers had regular *times* for prayer each day.
 - a. The Jewish people prayed morning, afternoon, and evening prayers (see Psalm 55:17).
 - b. In the book of Acts, we read that the early church prayed:
 - i. In the morning: Pentecost occurred at nine in the morning while the disciples were gathered to pray (see Acts 2:15).
 - ii. At noon: Peter went up to a rooftop in Joppa to pray at noontime, where he received a vision (see Acts 10:9).
 - iii. In the evening: Peter and John went to the temple at three in the afternoon, “the time of prayer” (Acts 3:1 NIV).
 - b. We need to set a consistent time each day for prayer.
 - 3. Application:
 - a. When do you pray? What is your set time?
 - b. Where do you pray? It may be by your bedside, in your office, or in your car.
 - c. If you have a set *time* and *place* for prayer, it will help you to establish a daily *habit* of prayer.
- E. Prayer thrives in community with others. The early believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching . . . and to prayer” (Acts 2:42 NIV).
 - 1. Jesus encourages at least two joining together in prayer.
 - a. In the context of binding and loosing, Jesus says “If two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:19 NIV).
 - b. As Mark Batterson states, “Maybe it’s your spouse. It could be a friend or a colleague. It might be your small group. Don’t do this alone. There is power in agreement.”

III. Conclusion

- A. Take up the prayer challenge:
 - 1. Find a *time*.

2. Find a *place*.
 3. Find a *friend*.
- B. If you want to see God do amazing things in your life and in the life of this church, then you *need* to a praying person.
- C. While it's good to have a personal prayer life, imagine the encouragement you will receive by praying with another believer in Christ. So find a person—maybe two or a small group—and seek God expectantly for these forty days. And expect this forty-day prayer challenge to change your life.

Dream Big

I. Introduction

- A. On October 16, 2009, Mark Moore launched MANA, which stands for “Mother Administered Nutritive Aid.” The nutritive aid is a peanut-based paste that is rich in calories, proteins, minerals, and vitamins and it is easy on stomachs that suffer from malnourishment.
- B. Mark Moore is a former missionary to Africa, and God gave him the vision for MANA at Ebenezer’s Coffeehouse. Mark states, “As that dream began to gel and I began to pull together resources and relationships to pursue the dream, Ebenezer’s became the meeting place.” Today, MANA produces more than a million packets of these nutritious meals a month.
- C. Mark Batterson notes, “You show me the size of your dream and I’ll show you the size of your God.” Today, we will consider the “bigness” of our God, what is involved in dreaming big, and how we can pray in our communities for those brave dreams to become realities.

II. Teaching

- A. We are encouraged to dream big when we hear one another’s stories. “They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11 NIV).
 - 2. We borrow faith from one another as we share our testimonies.
 - 3. By sharing stories of big faith, prayer becomes a team sport.
 - 4. Application:
 - a. Mark Batterson shares how he had suffered from asthma most of his life. He was dependent on inhalers to keep him breathing.
 - b. On July 2, 2016, Mark prayed his “bravest prayer” by asking God to heal him. He stopped talking to God about his problem and starting talking to his problem about God. He was healed.

- c. What is your bravest prayer? What's keeping you from praying it?
- B. We dream big when we believe God is more than able to answer us. "[God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20 NIV).
1. Note that Paul says in this verse that God is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask *or imagine*.
 2. God declared to Joshua, "I have delivered Jericho into your hands" (Joshua 6:2 NIV). Past tense! Before Joshua and the people did a thing, God declared the victory.
 3. God gets all the credit. He gets the glory. We just need to have faith that He will bring the answer and then express our gratitude to Him.
 - a. *Faith* is thanking God *before* He has acted.
 - b. *Gratitude* is thanking God *after* He has acted.
 4. Application:
 - a. The Bible reveals we have to keep circling and keep praying.
 - i. God told Joshua, "March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days" (Joshua 6:3 NIV). What if the Israelites had marched only around Jericho for *five* days?
 - ii. Elisha told the leprous Naaman, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed" (2 Kings 5:10 NIV). What if Naaman had only dipped *six* times in the Jordan River?
 - b. It is always too soon to quit believing. What are you believing God for today?
- C. We dream big when we hold tightly to the truth that *God is bigger than big* and *closer than close*.
1. *God is bigger than big*. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9 NIV).
 - a. The universe contains galaxies that are 15.5 billion light years away. God is transcendent.
 - b. Our best thought on our best day is 15.5 billion light years short of God.
 2. *God is closer than close*. "God's love is meteoric, His loyalty astronomic, His purpose titanic, His verdicts oceanic. Yet in His largeness

nothing gets lost; not a man, not a mouse, slips through the cracks”
(Psalm 36:5–6 MSG).

- a. God is aware of and cares about the smallest details of our lives. “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are numbered” (Luke 12:7 NIV). God is immanent. He is near.
- b. God, who cares about us, is glorified when we bring Him our big, bold, and brave dreams.

III. Conclusion

- A. G.K. Chesterton wrote, “How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be, if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos” (*Orthodoxy*, 1908).
- B. God-sized dreams are beyond our resources and beyond our ability to bring to pass. This gives God the opportunity to show up and show off His power! Nothing will keep us in a posture of prayer like a big dream. So dream big!
- C. With whom will you team up this week and ask God to answer your big dreams?

Pray Hard

I. Introduction

- A. Praying is hard work! Mark Batterson shares in *Draw the Circle* that when he set out to do his first prayer walk around the Capitol Hill, it was a 4.7-mile circle. It took him more than three hours to complete the walk.
- B. Mark has since made that prayer walk for more than fifteen years, and he and the church have seen God respond in amazing and profound ways. For one, National Community Church is now one church meeting in seven locations. They have learned to *pray hard* and pray with perseverance.
- C. So far in this series, we have considered how we need to keep “drawing a circle” and “dream big.” Today, we will next consider what it takes to pray hard. We will see that to pray hard requires two decisive actions: (1) consecrating yourself to God, and (2) taking a daring step of faith.

II. Teaching

- A. Praying hard requires consecrating ourselves to God. “Joshua told the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you’” (Joshua 3:5 NIV).
 - 1. To *consecrate* means “to set apart” or “to be fully devoted.” You give all of yourself to all of God.
 - 2. Consider two examples of this kind of full devotion to God.
 - a. Dr. J. Edwin Orr:
 - i. Dr. Orr once took several college students to England. They visited Epworth Rectory, which is now a Methodist Museum. It was the childhood home of John Wesley.
 - ii. In one of the bedrooms, there were two impressions where it is believed that John Wesley regularly knelt in prayer.

- iii. As the students were getting back on the bus, Dr. Orr noticed that one student was missing. When he went back upstairs, he found a young Billy Graham kneeling in those kneeholes and praying, “O Lord, do it again!”
 - iv. Billy Graham *consecrated* himself to God.
 - b. Dwight L. Moody:
 - i. Moody once heard the British revivalist Henry Varley say, “The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in and by the man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him.”
 - ii. Moody decided to himself apart to God to be that man. The school named after Moody has since reached millions around the world with the gospel.
- 3. Application:
 - a. To consecrate ourselves to God puts us in the place to see God work. But we also need to work.
 - b. As Mark Batterson notes, “You can’t just pray like it depends on God. You also have to work like it depends on you.”
 - c. Have you fully devoted yourself to God? If not, what is holding you back?
 - d. If so, what is your big, bold, and brave dream that you are praying hard about?
- B. Praying hard requires taking a daring step of faith. “Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river’” (Joshua 3:8 NIV).
 - 1. We must take the initiative by going first. The priests had to first step out into the water before the Jordan opened for the people to cross.
 - a. Jesus’ disciples obeyed the Lord’s commission, and God confirmed their obedience with “signs following” (Mark 16:20 KJV).
 - b. Faith is the taking the first step before God reveals the second step. We need to pray about it, but then we need to act on it. We need to step into the river—whatever that river is to us.
 - 2. This is a key principle in Scripture. “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go

and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:23–24 NIV). Jesus calls us to act—“first go.”

- a. There comes a moment when praying becomes a form of spiritual procrastination. Delayed obedience is disobedience. It’s time to stop praying and start acting!
- b. Peter Marshall, a former U.S. Senate chaplain, once said, “I wonder what would happen if we all agreed to read one of the Gospels, until we came to a place that told us to do something, then we went out to do it, and only after we had done it . . . began reading again?”

III. Conclusion

- A. Now that you have prayed, what action steps is God calling you to make?
- B. Remember, you demonstrate faith in your big God not just by believing God and His promises, but by acting on your faith. So pray, and then take the daring step!

Think Long

I. Introduction

- A. The Talmud records a story about a man named Honi, the “Circle Maker.” He is famous for drawing a circle in the sand and praying a prayer that saved a generation. But there is another story about Honi . . .
- B. One day, Honi was walking by a man who was planting a carob tree. Honi said to the man, “Since a carob tree does not bear fruit for seventy years, are you certain of living so long as to eat of it?” The man answered, “I found the world provided with carob trees; as my forefathers planted them for me, I likewise plant them for my descendants.”
- C. When it comes to prayer, we must “think long.” We must remember that prayers do not have an expiration date, and God will answer them across the span of generations. So today, we will consider how the Bible instructs us to offer prayers that will influence future decades . . . if not centuries.

II. Teaching

- A. Prayers are “memorial offerings” to God. “Cornelius stared at him in fear. ‘What is it, Lord?’ he asked. The angel answered, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God’” (Acts 10:4 NIV).
 - 1. The forty-day prayer challenge means we are building a memorial to God. God will remember our prayers long after we forget them.
 - 2. Mark Batterson notes that he has experienced many undeserved blessings in his life and ministry. He confesses, “I’ve heard the still small voice of God say: ‘Mark, the prayers of your grandfather are being answered in your life right now!’”
- B. Prayers, in God’s view, have generations in mind. “Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him . . . ‘Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised’” (Joshua 14:6,12 NIV).

1. According to rabbinic tradition, Caleb wanted the “hill country” (Hebron) because his ancestors were buried there at the Cave of Macphelah. And five hundred years after Caleb, David would be crowned king in Hebron.
 2. God doesn’t just answer our prayers *once*. He answers them over and over and over again.
 3. Application:
 - a. Have you considered that God’s blessings in your life might be the answers to your ancestors’ prayers—the people in your family line who has gone before you in faith and prayed bold prayers?
 - b. Who has prayed for you? How about those who follow you? Will they also experience God’s love because of your prayers?
 - c. To take up the challenge to pray for forty days does not mean we put God on a timeline. It means we get on God’s timeline.
- C. Prayers are often answered generations later. “Nevertheless, for the sake of his servant David, the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah. He had promised to maintain a lamp for David and his descendants forever” (2 Kings 8:19 NIV).
1. Jehoram was a wicked king of Judah (see 2 Kings 8:18). Jehoram lived 117 years after David, yet God, *for David’s sake*, did not destroy Judah.
 2. God has a “good memory.” He doesn’t forget His people or His promises. The only thing He forgets is our sin.
 3. As Walter Wink writes, “History belongs to the intercessors.”
- D. We need to offer up our prayers with patience and persistence. “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1 NIV).
1. Jesus told a story of a persistent widow who sought justice from a judge.
 - a. For some time the judge refused to hear the woman’s plea. But the woman was so persistent that the eventually the judge relented so she would quit coming to him.
 - b. Jesus’ point is that if a reluctant judge who neither “feared God nor cared what people thought” (Luke 18:2 NIV) could be swayed for justice, how much more will our loving heavenly Father answer us when we persist in prayer?
 2. Jesus also said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door

will be opened” (Matthew 7:7–8). In the original Greek, the verbs in these verses are present active imperatives.

- a. The imperative is used to express a command, and exhortation, or an entreaty. We are to ask, seek, and knock.
 - b. The present tense indicates this is a continuous action. We are to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking.
 - c. The active voice indicates that the subject is the performer of the action rather than the recipient of it. *We* are to do the actions of asking, seeking and knocking.
3. Mark Batterson states, “It’s always too soon to give up! What other option do you have? To pray or not to pray. Those are the only options.”

III. Conclusion

- A. Our faith, expressed in prayer, is like planting seeds for the future generations. We may not see the harvest in our lifetime.
- B. How does this truth change your view of prayer? Be honest. Are your prayers too self-centered? On a scale of one to ten, with one being “I give up praying quickly,” and ten being “I persist with patience and perseverance in prayer,” how would you rate your prayer life?
- C. What can you do to move one number closer to ten? What’s keeping you from doing that in your life?

The Ripple Effect

I. Introduction

- A. In 1983, physicist Lorne Whitehead published an article in the *American Journal of Physics* titled “Domino Chain Reaction.”
 - 1. Whitehead’s intriguing discovery is that a domino is capable of knocking over another domino that is one-and-a-half times its size. So, a two-inch domino can topple a three-inch domino. A three-inch domino can topple a four-and-a-half-inch domino.
 - 2. What is fascinating is that by the eighteenth domino, you could knock over the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The twenty-third domino could knock over the Eiffel Tower. And by the twenty-eighth domino, you could take down the Empire State Building!
- B. This is the power of the *ripple effect*, and prayer operates the same way—exponentially. Remember that God is able to do immeasurable more than we ask or imagine, which means that He can multiply the effects of our prayers.
- C. In this final message, we will explore four basic truths that immerse us in the stunning ripple effect of prayer.

II. Teaching

- A. God desires to hear us express our prayers.
 - 1. In Matthew 20:29–34, we read how Jesus was walking down the road from Jericho, and two men who were blind called out to Him.
 - a. Jesus stopped and called them. He asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” (verse 32 NIV).
 - b. The men replied, “We want our sight” (verse 33 NIV). Jesus had compassion and healed the two men.

2. Our loving God wants to hear us call out to Him and ask Him to help us. “Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples!” (Psalm 105:1 NKJV).
 3. Application:
 - a. Imagine Jesus standing before you and asking, “What do you want me to do for you?” What would you ask?
 - b. Do you dream big? Do you believe God wants to exponentially answer your prayers?
 - c. After the blind men could see, what else good do you think happened in their lives?
- B. God takes our small prayers and does great things.
1. In Zechariah 4:10, God said to His people, who were building the second temple, “Those who have made fun of this day of small beginnings will celebrate when they see Zerubbabel holding this important stone” (CEV).
 - a. By comparison to the grand first temple in Solomon’s day, this second temple was modest. But God was saying that we must not despise small things.
 - b. As Mark Batterson notes, “If you do little things like they’re big things, God will do big things like they’re little things.”
 2. Oswald Chambers once said, “It is inbred in us that we have to do exceptional things for God; but we have not. We have to be exceptional in ordinary things.” Regardless of the size of the request, we can be sure that God will *not* answer 100% of prayers we don’t pray!
 3. Application:
 - a. Just because something is small does not mean that it is unimportant.
 - b. Just consider the three smallest bones in the human body, which are in the inner ear: the *malleus*, *incus*, and *stapes* (also referred to as the *hammer*, *anvil*, and *stirrup* due to their shapes). These bones are tiny, but if they do not function, we cannot hear.
 - c. What seems small to you may be significant to God. So, given this, what small things will you ask today from God?
- C. God will answer our prayers in a greater manner than we imagined and in terms of generations.

1. In Joshua 4:6–7, we read that Joshua gave instructions for the people to set up stones of remembrance for all that God had done. Joshua said, “In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD” (NIV).
 - a. Mark Batterson writes, “God is thinking nations and generations. We think that what God does for us is for us, and it is. But it’s also for the next generation!”
 - b. Remember that prayer is the difference between *letting* things happen and *making* things happen. Prayer turns ordinary people into prophets who shape the destiny of their families, their churches, their community, and even their country.
 2. Application:
 - a. Remember last week’s sermon. What comes to your mind when you realize that your prayers for your children are prayers for your grandchildren and great-grandchildren?
 - b. There is an interesting idea that the “longest pencil is better than the longest memory.” It is easy to forget for what we are praying. Do you journal your prayers? How will you give God praise when He answers your forgotten prayers?
- D. God desires for us to develop the habit of praying regularly.
1. In Acts 10:2, we read that Cornelius “gave generously to those in need and *prayed to God regularly*” (NIV).
 2. Jesus encouraged His disciples to keep on praying and not give up (see. Matthew 7:7; Luke 18:1). Paul said we are to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), which means to always be connected to God.
 3. When we pray to God regularly, we will find that irregular things happen on a regular basis!
 4. Application:
 - a. George Müller was a Christian evangelist who established the Ashley Down orphanage in Bristol, England, from 1849–1870.
 - b. During his time on earth, Müller cared for 10,024 orphans while establishing 117 schools throughout England. In today’s dollars, Müller raised around \$150 million.

- c. Amazingly, Müller never asked anyone for a penny. He only asked God by turning every need into a prayer.
- d. God answered more than 30,000 of Müller's prayers. How do we know? He wrote them in his prayer journal.

III. Conclusion

- A. As we conclude this series on praying, remember the progression we have seen. We begin by "drawing a circle" around those requests that we want God to answer. We "dream big" as we do this, and then pray hard and think long-term.
- B. Also remember that the purpose of this forty-day prayer challenge is to help us all get into the habit of *praying to God regularly*. As Mark Batterson notes, "Prayer is the gift that keeps on giving, long after we are long gone. We may forget, but God remembers. And God doesn't just remember, He answers in His time, in His way, for His glory!"
- C. The goal of this challenge is not to just pray for forty days and stop, No, it is to keep on going every day for the rest of our lives! So, over the next few weeks, after this sermon series has ended, keep on drawing a circle in prayer!