



Draw the Circle

The 40 Day Prayer Challenge

Mark Batterson

New York Times Bestselling Author of *The Circle Maker*

Draw the Circle

Resources by Mark Batterson

All In

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The Circle Maker

The Circle Maker Video Curriculum

The Circle Maker Prayer Journal

The Circle Maker: Student Edition

Draw the Circle

The Grave Robber

If

In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day

Praying Circles around the Lives of Your Children

Primal

Soul Print

A Trip around the Sun

Wild Goose Chase

Draw the Circle

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Draw the Circle

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

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Introduction

The forty-day prayer challenge is going to change your life. In fact, the next forty days have the potential to dramatically alter the *rest* of your life. God is going to begin a good work in you, and He is going to carry it to completion. Miracles that happen in your life decades from now will trace their origin back to this season of prayer. Breakthroughs that happen during these forty days will become generational blessings that live on long after you die.

If you press into God's presence like never before, you will experience God like never before. You'll look back on these forty days as the best forty days of your life. They won't be the easiest forty days; in fact, they may be the hardest. Don't be surprised if you experience spiritual opposition along the way. But if you pray through, God will break through in new ways. It's as inevitable as the tide coming in.

There is nothing magical about forty days, but there is something biblical about it. That's the number of days Jesus spent in the wilderness fasting and praying. It marked a critical chapter in His life — the transition from His earthly

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father's business to His heavenly Father's business. Jesus was tested like never before, but this experience set the stage for His greatest victories over the enemy. The war against sin and Satan may have been won on Calvary's cross, but a key battle happened in the wilderness three years earlier. When Jesus returned to Galilee, He wasn't the same person. You won't be either. You'll emerge from this forty-day prayer challenge, just like Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you want God to do something new in you, you cannot keep doing the same old thing. You have to do something different. And if you do, God will create new capacities within you. There will be new gifts and new revelations. But you've got to pay the price. You'll get out of this what you put into it.

How to Start a Revival

Draw the Circle is a sequel of sorts. Since the release of *The Circle Maker*, I've heard thousands of prayer testimonies that have set my faith on fire. Almost every day I hear a new story that makes me want to applaud God. This book is my way of stewarding those testimonies by sharing them. I've also learned more about prayer since *The Circle Maker* was released than the knowledge I had beforehand. I'll share those new discoveries in the pages that follow.

So let me pick up where *The Circle Maker* left off.

Rodney "Gypsy" Smith was born on the outskirts of London in 1860. He never received a formal education, yet he lectured at Harvard. Despite his humble origins, he was invited by two sitting United States presidents to the White

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House. Gypsy crisscrossed 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.

Gypsy was powerfully used of God. Everywhere he went, it seemed like revival was right on his heels. But it wasn't his preaching that brought revival. It never is. Preaching may move the hearts of men, but praying moves the heart of God. And that's where revival comes from.

Gypsy revealed his secret to a delegation of revival seekers who sought an audience with him. They wanted to know how they could make a difference with their lives the way he had with his. His answer was simple yet profound — as timely and timeless now as it was a hundred years ago. He gave them this advice:

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.

Start Circling

I have a confession to make. Even though I wrote a book on prayer, and my personal prayer life was thriving, I had failed to lead our church in corporate prayer. When that changed, everything changed with it.

When we did our first forty-day prayer challenge at National Community Church, it completely changed our church culture. It ranks as one of the most significant seasons of spiritual

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growth in our church's history. And on a personal level, I was a different person afterward.

As we prepared for the forty-day challenge, I believed that God wanted our church to circle 2 Chronicles 7:14 by hitting our knees every day at 7:14 a.m. I explained to our church that the time in and of itself wasn't significant but offered a daily reminder of the promise we were circling in prayer.

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

On the first day of the prayer challenge, I dropped to my knees right after I got out of bed. This daily habit didn't stop on day 40. Please read this carefully: the goal of the forty-day prayer challenge isn't to get what you want by day 40. In fact, the goal isn't to get what you want at all. The goal is to figure out what God wants, what God wills. Then you start circling it in prayer and don't stop until God answers.

Too often we pray ASAP prayers — *as soon as possible*. We need to start praying ALAT prayers — *as long as it takes*. The goal of the prayer challenge is to establish a prayer habit so you're still praying on day 41, day 57, day 101, day 365.

Logistics

Who should I do the prayer challenge with?

You may want to consider a church-wide challenge or turn your small group into a prayer circle. You can do this chal-

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lenge with your family or with your friends. But whatever you do, don't do it alone.

I've met employers who give a copy of *Draw the Circle* to everyone they hire. I've met small groups who have repeated the forty-day challenge as many as fourteen times! There are youth groups that have circled their schools, members of Congress who circle the Capitol, and lots of sports chaplains and coaches circling football fields, baseball fields, and basketball courts! In fact, one NBA team started *Draw the Circle* on the first day of the playoffs and kept circling until they won the most recent NBA championship. I'm not saying that's why they won, but I'm not saying it isn't either!

What should I circle?

Don't feel bad if you don't know what to circle on day 1. One of the biggest misconceptions about prayer is that it means outlining our agenda to God as a divine to-do list. The true purpose of prayer is to get into God's presence so He can outline His agenda for us. Here's my advice: pray about what to pray about. God will reveal a promise, a problem, or a person. Then circle whatever God has prompted you to pray for with the same kind of consistency with which the earth circles the sun.

Too often we pray for something once and then completely forget about it. So when God answers, we fail to give Him the glory because we forgot what we asked for. That's one reason why you need to journal during these forty days. Document your prayers and God's answers. If you don't have a journal, pick up a copy of *The Circle Maker Prayer Journal*. It'll help you not just pray, but pray through.

During our forty-day prayer challenge, different people

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circled different things. We saw prodigals come back to God after years of running away. Marriages were restored. Job opportunities opened up. Provision for financial needs came out of nowhere. Divine appointments happened on a daily basis. And there were even a few miraculous healings.

When should I take the challenge?

You can do this at any time, but the important thing is to establish a start date or end date. A forty-day prayer challenge is a great way to begin a new year or to end a year. At NCC, we approach Lent as a way of beginning the spiritual journey to Easter. This past year, I coined the word *ExperiLent* because we wanted to see what would happen if we circled one promise for forty days, and God delivered. You'll read about it in the devotion for day 34. You can also leverage a birthday or holiday. It was a forty-day fast leading up to my thirty-fifth birthday that proved to be a turning point in my life. I turned my birthday into a self-imposed deadline that yielded my first book.

Where should I pray?

It's important to make a daily appointment with God by determining a *time and place* to pray. If it helps, put the appointment in your calendar or set an alarm. I recommend that you give God the first few minutes of the day. When I pray at the beginning of the day, it's like my whole day becomes a prayer. When I dial into God's frequency in the morning, I hear His still, small voice the rest of the day.

I also recommend a corporate gathering for prayer. Kick it off with a night of prayer and praise as a church, as a group, as a team, as a family. Then sustain the momentum with daily gatherings. Our 7:14 a.m. weekday prayer gatherings not only

Introduction

created tremendous synergy; they were a way of holding us accountable.

Find Out about Prayer

In 1952, a Princeton doctoral student asked Albert Einstein a question: “What original dissertation research is left?” I’m intrigued and inspired by Einstein’s answer: “Find out about prayer.”

That is the challenge on the table: find out about prayer.

My prayer for you is that each day on this journey will yield a new discovery. Those discoveries will change the way you pray, and when you change the way you pray, everything else changes.

Few people had a more profound impact on the spiritual climate of America in the last half of the twentieth century than Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU). He championed evangelism and discipleship from college campuses to foreign mission fields and influenced millions of people through the organization he started and the books he wrote.

In 1994, Dr. Bright felt led to do a forty-day fast for revival in America. The man who went into that prayer circle and the man who came out were two different people. His faith soared. He sensed God’s presence like never before. And biblical truths went from his mind to his heart to his soul. In his own words, “This proved to be the most important forty days of my life.”

I believe the same thing can be true for you.

Draw the circle!

Day 1

Get Ready

He prayed to God regularly.

ACTS 10:2

Five words tell me everything I need to know about Cornelius: *He prayed to God regularly*. Scripture doesn't record exactly *when* or *where* or *how* he prayed. It doesn't reveal whether he prayed in the morning or the evening. It doesn't tell us what he said or the posture he prayed in. It just says he prayed regularly. And when you pray to God regularly, irregular things happen on a regular basis. You never know when or where or how God will invade the routine of your life, but you can live in holy anticipation, knowing that God is orchestrating supernatural synchronicities.

Like a grandmaster who strategically positions chess pieces on a chessboard, God is always preparing us and positioning us for divine appointments. And prayer is the way we discern the next move. The plans of God are only revealed in the presence of God. We don't get our marching orders until we get on our knees! But if we hit our knees, God will take us places we never imagined going by paths we didn't even know existed.

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If history is a chess match between good and evil, then Acts 10 is one of God's epic moves. It reveals how one prayer can change the game. It reveals what can happen when two people pray. It reveals the power of prayer to checkmate the enemy and seal the victory.

Here's the play-by-play.

A man named Cornelius has a vision while praying in Caesarea. Simultaneously, Peter has a vision while praying in Joppa. Those visions collide in a divine appointment that radically alters the course of history. Up to this point, the Way was a sect of Judaism. It isn't until Cornelius, an officer in the Roman army, puts his faith in Jesus Christ that the gospel is opened up to Gentiles. If *he* doesn't get saved, *you* can't get saved. It's not even an option. So if you're a non-Jewish follower of Jesus, your spiritual genealogy traces back to this genesis moment. When Cornelius puts his faith in Christ, the door of salvation swings wide open to the Gentiles. But it started with two people praying. Those two prayers have been answered billions of times over the last two thousand years. In fact, they were answered yet again when you put your faith in Jesus Christ.

Now let me state the obvious: Cornelius and Peter should have never met each other. Never. Ever. They were separated by geography. The thirty-two-mile distance between their two towns may not seem like much to us, but the average person in the first century didn't travel outside a thirty-mile radius of their birthplace. And more significantly, they were separated by ethnicity. Roman soldiers and Jewish disciples didn't hang out. In fact, Peter broke every law in the Jew-

Day 1: Get Ready

ish books when he entered the home of Cornelius. Stepping through that doorway was like crossing the Rubicon. He went against everything he'd ever known and risked everything he'd ever accomplished. That doorway to the home of Cornelius was like the wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* or the rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland*. I call it The Door to Whosoever. When Peter entered the house of Cornelius, it literally meant, "Whosoever will may come." And that includes you and me!

Get Ready

It's not every day that a member of the United States Congress requests a meeting with me. At first I was curious. Then I got a little nervous. I hoped it had nothing to do with the fact that I had illegally taken my kids sledding at the Capitol during snowmageddon a few winters back, but I figured that couldn't possibly warrant a federal investigation. Turns out the congressman just wanted to thank me for writing *Wild Goose Chase*, a book he read during his first run for Congress.

As we sipped lattes in my office above Ebenezers Coffeehouse, the congressman shared his backstory with me. Not unlike Daniel's improbable rise to political power, James's path was full of unpredictable twists and turns. It all started one day in 2007 when the Holy Spirit said in that still, small voice, "Get ready." His initial reaction was, *Get ready for what?* At the time, James was directing one of the largest Christian camps in the country and preaching on weekends. He was

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perfectly content doing what he was doing, but the Holy Spirit kept impressing the same thing on him: “Get ready.”

Several months later, James was reading the newspaper when he came across an article about the congresswoman who represented his district. Rumors were flying that she was going to make a run for governor, which would leave her seat in Congress vacant. That’s when the Holy Spirit said, “This is it.”

James didn’t have a political bone in his body. In fact, he didn’t even know the boundaries of his congressional district. He went online to do a little research when his wife walked in and said, “What are you looking at?” He said, “County statistics.” She said, “We’re running for Congress, aren’t we?” They had never talked about it or thought about it. Running for Congress seemed like a wild goose chase. After all, James had no background, no network, and no resources. There was no way he could win — unless, of course, the front-runner happened to drop out of the race a few months before the election. That is exactly what happened, and James Lankford was elected to represent the 5th Congressional District of Oklahoma. And he has since been elected to the United States Senate.

The Celtic Christians had a fascinating name for the Holy Spirit. They called Him *An-Geadh-Glas*, which means “wild goose.” Can you think of a better description of what it’s like to live a Spirit-led life than “wild goose chase”? When you follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, you never know who you’ll meet, where you’ll go, or what you’ll do. But one thing is certain: it’ll be anything but boring!

At the end of our conversation, Congressman Lankford

Day 1: Get Ready

mentioned that he had also read *The Circle Maker*. And he's putting it into practice. If you visit the Capitol on any given morning when Congress is in session, you'll find the camp-director-turned-senator circling his constituents, colleagues, and country in prayer!

Anything but Routine

If you establish a prayer routine, your life will be anything but routine. You will go to places, do things, and meet people you have no business going to, doing, or meeting. You don't need to seek opportunity. All you have to do is seek God. And if you seek God, opportunity will seek you.

I live in a town, Washington, D.C., where it's all about who you know. *Who you know* is more important than *what you know*. This is certainly true for the children of God. Who you know — the heavenly Father — is far more important than what you know.

Don't worry about meeting the right people. If you meet with God, God will make sure you meet the right people at the right time. After all, there is nobody He doesn't know. It's one degree of separation! And if God can change the heart of Pharaoh, He can help you find favor with anybody and everybody. Let God do the promoting and networking. I'm certainly not suggesting that you don't apply for a promotion or trade business cards, but seek first His kingdom. You've got to do God's will God's way.

Remember when Moses got impatient and took matters into his own hands by killing an Egyptian taskmaster? He

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thought it would expedite God's plan. In reality, it delayed God's plan by forty years. He thought it would bring relief, but it made the burden on the Israelites almost unbearable. That's what happens when we try to do God's job for Him. It's unbearable. When we try to make things go faster, we usually slow things down. When we try to make things easier, we usually make them harder.

Don't try to manufacture your own miracles.

Don't try to answer your own prayers.

Don't try to do God's job for Him.

Stay humble. Stay patient. Stay focused.

Keep circling.



Draw
the
Circle

If you pray to God regularly, irregular things will happen on a regular basis.

Day 2

Established by God

*In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the LORD establishes their steps.*

PROVERBS 16:9

It may feel like you are sitting still right now, but you are not. You are on a planet that is rotating on its axis at 1,000 miles per hour. Like clockwork, it makes one full revolution every twenty-four hours. And if that isn't amazing enough, planet Earth is moving around the sun at speeds approaching 67,000 miles per hour! So the next time you feel like you've had an unproductive day, remind yourself that you did travel more than 1.5 million miles through space today.

Now let me ask you a question: When was the last time you lost sleep because you were concerned about the Creator keeping the planets in orbit? When was the last time you got down on your knees at night and prayed, "Lord, thanks for keeping the planet rotating. I wasn't sure if we'd make the full rotation today, but You did it again!" I'm guessing the answer to these questions is *never*.

We don't doubt God's ability to keep the planets in orbit, but we have a difficult time believing He can keep our lives

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in orbit. You tell me which is more difficult — keeping the planets in orbit or determining our steps? The truth is that we already trust God for the big things; now we need to trust Him for the little things, like healing our cancer, getting us out of debt, helping us conceive, or helping us find our soul mate. I'm certainly not suggesting that any of these situations are small. They are giant mountains to us. But prayer can turn them into molehills!

God is great not just because nothing is too big for Him; God is also great because nothing is too small. The Sovereign One cares about every minute detail of our lives.

Every act of obedience, no matter how small, makes our heavenly Father proud. Every act of faith — even a faith as small as a mustard seed — puts a smile on His face. Every sacrifice, no matter how insignificant it may seem to us, makes a difference.

Like a proud parent watching their child take their first steps, God rejoices over every baby step. And He can turn those small steps of faith into giant leaps.

Divine Assignment

I have a handful of prayers I pray all the time. Because of their frequent repetition, I call them prayer mantras. One is that God will put my books into the right hands at the right time. I've prayed this prayer thousands of times, and God has answered it in dramatic fashion countless times. The right book in the right hands at the right time can save a marriage, avert a mistake, demand a decision, plant a seed, conceive a

Day 2: Established by God

dream, solve a problem, and prompt a prayer. That's why I write. And that's why, for me, a book sold is not a book sold; a book sold is a prayer answered. I don't know the name and situation of every reader, but God does, and that's all that matters.

The other day I got an e-mail from Peter, a man who started reading *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day* on a flight to Las Vegas. During the first half of his flight, he read chapter 1 and felt challenged and convicted. One sentence arrested his attention: "God is in the business of strategically positioning us in the right place at the right time, but it's up to us to see and seize those opportunities that are all around us all the time." So Peter switched planes in Phoenix and sat down in his new seat assignment. He said hello to the girl next to him, but she shut him down rather abruptly. It was one of those looks that says, *Don't talk to me the rest of this flight, and by the way, the armrest belongs to me!* Peter didn't want to offend her or bother her, but he couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. He knew he needed to swallow his pride, face his fears, and seize the opportunity. He leaned over and said, "I know it's absolutely none of my business, but you seem so burdened. If sharing it with a complete stranger might help, I'm all ears."

The seventeen-year-old girl, who was three months pregnant, proceeded to tell him she was running away from home. Her boyfriend told her to take off and "take care of it." She had stolen her dad's credit card that morning to buy a ticket to Vegas to get an abortion. During the flight, Peter spoke words of comfort and encouragement. When they landed in

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Vegas, he convinced the girl to call her parents, who were worried sick. Her parents convinced her to grab the next flight and come home.

I'm quite sure one life, perhaps two, were saved that day! All because one man believed that a seat assignment might be a divine assignment. And when we act on those prayer promptings, the Grandmaster can use a single pawn to check-mate the enemy's plans.

At the end of his e-mail, Peter thanked me for writing the book. He wrote, "So that's what happened after chapter 1. I can't wait to see what happens after chapter 2!" Me too! All I know is this: God is setting up divine appointments all the time. Only God can *make* the appointment, but only you can *keep* the appointment. It's your job to recognize and respond to the God-ordained opportunities that come your way.

Choreography

Few promises are more circled in my Bible than Proverbs 16:9: "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps."

God wants us to get where God wants us to go more than we want to get where God wants us to go. And He is awfully good at getting us there. All we have to do is follow the script of Holy Scripture and the improvisation of the Holy Spirit.

We can't create divine appointments. All we can do is keep them.

We can't plan God-ordained opportunities. All we can do is seize them.

Day 2: Established by God

We can't perform miracles. All we can do is pray for them.

Our job is to hear His voice. His job is to establish our steps. And if we do our job, God will do His!

The Hebrew word *kûn*, translated in Proverbs 16:9 as “establishes,” can also be translated as “determines,” “prepares,” “provides,” “sets in place,” “directs,” “firmly decides,” “makes secure.” It’s a meticulous word that involves careful planning right down to the smallest detail. It’s a redemptive word that celebrates God’s ability to redeem past experiences and recycle them for future opportunities. It’s a calming word that imparts confidence in the fact that God has everything under control. It’s a creative word that hints at the beauty of God’s artistry.

God is the Composer. Your life is His musical score.

God is the Artist. Your life is His canvas.

God is the Architect. Your life is His blueprint.

God is the Writer. You are His book.



*God is great not just because nothing
is too big for Him; God is also
great because nothing is too small.*

Day 3

Amazing Things

*“Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow
the LORD will do amazing things among you.”*

JOSHUA 3:5

More than a hundred years ago, a British revivalist spoke the words to Dwight L. Moody that would transform Moody’s approach to life — words of challenge that echo across every generation: “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.”

Why not you?

All of us want to do amazing things for God, but that isn’t our job; it is God’s job. Our job is simply to consecrate ourselves by yielding our will to His will. And if we do our job, God will do His job. If we consecrate ourselves to God, amazing things will happen. It’s absolutely inevitable. Consecration always ends in amazing!

The Israelites were camped on the eastern banks of the Jordan River when God gave them this command: “Consecrate yourselves.” And because they obeyed, God delivered on the promise. He parted the Jordan River, and the Israelites

Day 3: Amazing Things

walked through on dry ground. We'd rather build a boat or build a bridge. We try to do things for God instead of letting God do things for us. And it's certainly a two-way street. We need to *work like it depends on us*, but we also need to *pray like it depends on God*. That's what consecration is all about. It's letting God do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And that's how God gets all the glory.

Consecration is a complete surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. We relinquish everything to God — our time, talent, and treasure. It's a complete divestiture. Nothing belongs to us, not even ourselves. But the exchange rate is unbelievable. All of our sin is transferred to Christ's account, and all of His righteousness is transferred to our account. God cancels our debt, writes us into His will, and calls it even!

The word *consecrate* means "to set apart." It means "to be designated for a special purpose." It means "to be completely dedicated to God."

The Son of God set the standard. Jesus gave all of Himself at Calvary, and He expects nothing less in return. If Jesus hung on His cross, we can certainly carry our cross. His death demands our lives.

Gate D8

During our prayer challenge at National Community Church, our church gathered for corporate prayer every morning at our coffeehouse. Like clockwork, we hit our knees at 7:14 a.m. sharp. It was such a regular routine that it became second

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nature. Almost like hunger pangs that hit you after going too long without eating, I couldn't go too long without hitting my knees. Kneeling became almost as instinctual as eating or sleeping.

One day I had to miss our prayer meeting because of an early morning flight to Cleveland. As I got off the plane, I realized it was time to pray. I knew I'd be kneeling at our coffeehouse, but I was in the middle of an airport. And that's when I felt the Holy Spirit throwing down the gauntlet, impressing on me the need to kneel right then and there. To be honest, I resisted: "But, Lord, I'm in the middle of the Cleveland airport." The Lord said, "I know exactly where you are. Gate D8."

At first I rationalized *not* kneeling.

I don't want to feed negative stereotypes about religious fanatics. I can pray just as effectively as I walk toward baggage claim. I can kneel a little later in the privacy of my hotel room.

While all of these things are true, I knew it wasn't the point. I knew the Lord was testing me to see if I'd be willing to obey Him whenever, wherever, whatever. I knew that if I failed this test, I would be standing in God's way of using me in bigger ways. I wanted to prove to Him that I cared more about what He thought than about what people thought. I wanted to prove to Him that I belong to Him everywhere, all the time. And I knew that if God could trust me with the little things, then He could use me to do big things. So after looking both ways down the terminal, I hit my knees at Gate D8. It was one small step in the long journey toward complete consecration. A little piece of my ego died that day at Gate D8.

Day 3: Amazing Things

I shared that story with our congregation, and I was inspired by the response. You've heard of a flash mob? Well, our church became a kneeling mob! I've heard stories of people kneeling in elevators, in classrooms, in banks, and in courtrooms. It isn't about kneeling in strange places at strange times; it's about the willingness to obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It's about a willingness to kneel anyplace, anytime.

Veto Power

Consecration means we no longer call the shots. We give God veto power. His word is the final word, whether it's Holy Scripture or the Holy Spirit. Either way, it's no longer a selfish spirituality that asks God to serve our purposes. It's all about serving His purposes so that His glory is revealed.

Consecration is death to self.

I know there is a fear that if we give more of ourselves to God, there will be less of us left, but it's the exact opposite. It's not until we die to self that we truly come alive. The more we give to God, the more we have and the more we become. It's only in losing our lives that we will really find them.

Sometimes prayer is a casual conversation with God. It's like two friends catching up over coffee. But sometimes prayer involves intense intercession, as it was for Jesus praying in Gethsemane on the eve of His crucifixion. It was so intense that Jesus was literally sweating drops of blood. He was facing the greatest test of his life on earth, so He prayed through the night. Three times He prayed a prayer of consecration: "My

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Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Consecration is a process of surrender that never ends. And prayer is the catalyst. It begins with a sinner’s prayer. We confess our sins to the Savior and surrender our lives to His lordship. And along the way, our spiritual journeys are marked by decisive moments when we consecrate ourselves to God in our own garden of Gethsemane.

Jonathan Edwards is famous for his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” which helped spark the first Great Awakening. Along with his pastorate in North Hampton, Massachusetts, he served as the president of Princeton University. Of his known descendants, there are more than 300 ministers or missionaries, 120 university professors, 60 authors, 30 judges, 14 college presidents, 3 members of Congress, and 1 vice president. That’s an impressive family lineage! And that legacy, like every spiritual genealogy, traces back to a moment of consecration.

On January 12, 1723, Jonathan Edwards made a solemn dedication of himself to God. He consecrated himself, all of himself, to God.

I made a solemn dedication of myself to God, and wrote it down; giving up myself, and all that I had to God; to be for the future, in no respect, my own; to act as one that had no right to himself, in any respect. And solemnly vowed, to take God for my whole portion and felicity; looking on nothing else, as any part of my happiness, nor acting as if it were.

Day 3: Amazing Things



*If we give more of ourselves to God,
God will give more of Himself to us.*

Day 4

Don't Pray Away

*“This happened so that the works of God
might be displayed in him.”*

JOHN 9:3

My friends John and Tricia Tiller experienced a parent's worst nightmare nearly a decade ago. Their three-year-old son, Eli, was playing by himself in his room when Tricia became concerned because it was too quiet. When she walked into his room, Eli was nowhere to be seen. That's when she saw a table out of place. It had been pushed beneath his second-story bedroom window, and the window screen was conspicuously missing. Tricia's worst fears were realized when she ran to the window, looked down, and saw Eli lying thirteen feet below.

Eli was medivaced to the hospital, where he fought for his life in the ICU for three weeks. He miraculously survived, but not without significant brain damage. He has virtually no peripheral vision on his right side, and the left side of his body has very little motor skills or muscle development. Eli speaks with a severe stutter and walks with a pronounced limp. Yet twelve-year-old Eli Tiller has as sweet a spirit and as

Day 4: Don't Pray Away

courageous an attitude as anybody I've ever met. He recently sang at National Community Church, and there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

John and Tricia have thanked God countless times for saving their son, but their prayers for complete healing have gone unanswered. In the aftermath of the accident, John dueled with doubt.

I began to interrogate God. "Why, God? Why do little boys fall from windows?"

Why did my little boy fall from that window? Why him? Why me? I looked to Scripture for an answer, and it turns out that "Why, God?" is not a new question at all.

In John 9, Jesus encountered a man who was born blind, and the people falsely assumed it was the result of sin. They asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Jesus told them it was neither! The people assumed it was a generational curse or a lack of faith. But Jesus set the record straight by revealing the real reason: "This happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

Since Eli's accident, Tricia and I have done everything humanly possible to make our son well. We've spent tens of thousands of dollars on uninsured medical equipment. For the first three years after the accident, Tricia and Eli literally spent 80 percent of their waking hours in therapy. We had faith that he would be completely healed. We knew it was going to happen, so we just kept praying and kept waiting. We waited and waited. We knew that one day we'd be standing in front of crowds saying, "Look what the Lord has

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done! He has completely healed our son.” But that’s not what happened.

After three years of doing everything we could for our son, it was time to accept his current condition and choose to live life with disability. This disability was something we couldn’t remove, and evidently God was choosing to not completely heal Eli. So we had to burn our old scripts and look for what God could do with our new script. So for the past five years, we’ve accepted life with disability. That doesn’t mean I’ve stopped praying for my son. Like any father, I’d give my right arm to see my son healed. But instead of getting discouraged or getting angry, I choose to look for what God can do.

Sometimes the purpose of prayer is to *get us out of* circumstances, but more often than not, the purpose of prayer is to *get us through* them. I’m certainly not suggesting we shouldn’t pray deliverance prayers, but there are times we need to pray prevailing prayers. We need to ask God to give us the grace to sustain, the strength to stand firm, and the willpower to keep on keeping on.

Praying Away versus Praying Through

There is a big difference between *praying away* and *praying through*.

We’re often so anxious to get out of difficult, painful, or challenging situations that we fail to grow through them. We’re so fixated on *getting out of them* that we don’t *get anything out of them*. We fail to learn the lessons God is trying to teach us or cultivate the character God is trying to grow in

Day 4: Don't Pray Away

us. We're so focused on God changing our circumstances that we never allow God to change us! So instead of ten or twenty years of experience, we have one year of experience repeated ten or twenty times.

Sometimes we need to pray "get me out" prayers. But sometimes we need to pray "get me through" prayers. And we need the discernment to know when to pray what.

If we're being completely honest, most of our prayers have as their chief objective our own personal comfort rather than God's glory. We want to pray away every problem, but those shortsighted prayers would short-circuit God's perfect plan. There are seasons and situations when we need to simply pray through.

My prayer batting average is no better than anyone else's. I swing and miss all the time, but I have determined that I'm going to "go down swinging." Even when a prayer isn't answered the way I want, I have a peace that passes understanding because I know that God heard me. It just means the answer is no. And I've learned to praise God when the answer is no, not just when the answer is yes. It simply means I'm asking for the wrong thing or for the wrong reason or at the wrong time. And I'm convinced that the day will come when we thank God for the prayers He did *not* answer as much as the ones He did because He had a better answer. And the best answer is very rarely what is most convenient or comfortable for us. The best answer is always what brings God the most glory!

Can our prayers change our circumstances? Absolutely! But when our circumstances don't change, it's often an

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indication that God is trying to change us. The primary purpose of prayer is not to change circumstances; the primary purpose of prayer is to change us! But either way, the chief objective remains the same: to glorify God in any and every situation.



*Sometimes God delivers us from
our problems; sometimes God delivers
us through our problems.*

Day 5

Write It Down

“Write down the revelation.”

HABAKKUK 2:2

I have a handful of sayings that our staff can recite from memory because I repeat them all the time. One of them is this: *the shortest pencil is longer than the longest memory*. That’s why I keep a prayer journal. Next to my Bible, nothing is more sacred to me than my journal. It’s the way I mark my trail. It’s the way I process problems and record revelations. It’s the way I keep track of the prayers I’ve prayed so that I can give God the glory when He answers.

Journaling is one of the most overlooked and undervalued spiritual disciplines. In my estimation, it’s on a par with praying, fasting, and meditating. It’s the way we document what God is doing in our lives. In Habakkuk 2:2, the Lord states, “Write down the revelation.” Why? Because we have a natural tendency to remember what we should forget and forget what we should remember. Journaling is the best antidote, maybe the only antidote, to spiritual amnesia.

This year I started taking my journal with me everywhere I go. When I’m in a meeting, I write things in my prayer journal

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so I can double back and pray about them later. If I'm listening to someone speak, I take notes so I can process them in prayer. And of course, I always have my prayer journal handy when I'm praying. I pray about current situations and future dreams. I have a prayer list for my children that helps me pray consistently and strategically. And I often journal my meditations on Scripture. Then, every once in a while, I go back through my journal and circle the things I need to keep praying through.

My prayer journal doubles as my prayer genealogy. I can trace many of the blessings, breakthroughs, and miracles back to their genesis prayers. As I look back through my journals, I'm able to connect the dots between my prayers and God's answers. Connecting these dots inspires my faith like nothing else because it paints a picture of God's faithfulness.

We kicked off this calendar year with a sermon series on *The Circle Maker*, and I encouraged everyone in our congregation to get a prayer journal. I've been amazed at how many people's prayer lives have been revolutionized by the simple act of journaling. I'm convinced it is the key to consistency and specificity in prayer. And it even adds an element of fun. It turns prayer into a game of watching and waiting to see how God will answer!

Journal like a Journalist

One of our church attenders recently shared with me one of the most well-documented prayer testimonies I've ever received. It seems particularly appropriate that this testa-

Day 5: Write It Down

ment to journaling came from a journalist. After I read it, this thought fired across my synapses: we all need to journal like a journalist.

Kimberly's lifelong dream was to work at a major network covering politics. Not only did she end up at the largest network; she got to cover the most famous address in the country, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. As a member of the White House travel pool, she often accompanies the president on Air Force One. In fact, her first trip was April 29, 2011 — the same day that President Obama authorized the Osama bin Laden mission.

Kimberly is living her dream, but like every dream, it took a lot of prayer and a lot of patience. During our sermon series on *The Circle Maker*, she went back through dozens of her journals from the past decade. As she retraced her steps, she saw the hand of God on every page. Kimberly's prayer genealogy started in 2001. As a college senior, she penned this fragile yet faith-filled prayer:

Dare I ask for my dreams? Dare I see the imagination of the soul? Dare I risk? What if I ask and receive? So then, I risk. I ask of my King, "May I impact others with news and knowledge?"

After college, Kimberly thought about grad school, considered pursuing library science, and contemplated moving to Chicago or New York. It was during this season of wandering that she created a prayer map — a sheet of paper in her journal with a verse at the top and prayer requests written below. On one of those pages, she circled Psalm 37:4: "Delight

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yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.” That was a critical promise at a critical time.

On November 4, 2003, she wrote out this prayer:

*Where do you want me to go? Where can I represent you?
Where is your will? Tug at my heart. I am willing and
waiting.*

Fast-forward to April 15, 2004.

Kimberly was sitting on a bench overlooking Lake Michigan, depressed by how much money she wasn’t making. In that moment, the dream of working at a major network was birthed in her spirit. She also knew she needed to take a step of faith and move to Washington, D.C. So with no job and very little money, Kimberly made the move to D.C. She slept on a friend’s floor for several months until she could get on her feet financially. To make ends meet, she worked for a temp agency filing papers while she sent out hundreds of résumés and made hundreds of cold calls.

After numerous dead ends, Kimberly finally got her first break working for a small news bureau during the graveyard shift. Her first night as a full-time journalist was the day Hurricane Katrina hit.

As awful as those overnights were, turns out those overnights were the best thing to hone my journalistic skills. This was also the height of the Iraq War so everything was happening overnight. I got to see how the early morning shift can set the agenda for the entire news cycle.

About a year into the overnight shift, Kimberly wanted to

Day 5: Write It Down

get a day job so she could get a life! It was killing her social life and spiritual life, so she applied for a day job with a major network. She thought her dream job was finally at her fingertips. She got an interview, but the door slammed shut. It was devastating. That's when many of us give up on our dreams, but Kimberly kept circling her dream job while working her night job for another year! Then she got another interview with the same network, and this time the door opened.

Long story short, it took a decade of working like it depended on her and praying like it depended on God for her dream to come true. But because she journaled her prayers, Kimberly is able to look back and see how God determined her steps. God's fingerprints were on every page!

I'm the granddaughter of farmers. One of my grandmothers only got an eighth-grade education because she had to leave school to help out on the farm. She was told, "All you'll ever do is milk cows."

Now her granddaughter works at the White House. She can be in the Oval Office and say, "Excuse me, Mr. President."

What a country. What a God.



*The shortest pencil is longer
than the longest memory.*

Day 6

Shameless Audacity

*“... yet because of your shameless audacity
he will surely get up and give you
as much as you need.”*

LUKE 11:8

I was doing a radio interview shortly after *The Circle Maker* was released, and the host of the show told an amazing story about his missionary friend, Dr. Bob Bagley. Bob’s church in Africa didn’t have a church building, so they literally met under the shade of a single tree near the village — that is, until the local witch doctor cursed the tree, and it withered. The church didn’t just lose their shade; they were overshadowed by the curse. It undermined the authority of their message. Bob knew their status in the village was in jeopardy if he didn’t do something about it, so he called for a public prayer meeting. Not unlike Elijah, who challenged the prophets of Baal to a prayer duel, Bob confronted the curse and called down a blessing on the tree. He literally laid hands on the tree and prayed that God would resurrect it.

Now *that’s* shameless audacity!

If God doesn’t answer his prayer, he would have dug an

Day 6: Shameless Audacity

even deeper hole. That is the risk of prayer, isn't it? But if we don't ask, we'll never know. We accumulate lots of wouldas, couldas, and shouldas. Here's what I know for sure: God won't answer 100 percent of the prayers we don't pray.

There is an old adage: *Desperate times call for desperate measures*. Every prayer is a calculated risk, but sometimes God calls us to ante up all the faith we have, and then let the chips fall where they may! That's what Bob did. He asked God to resurrect a tree, and then he added a little tagline to his prayer: "It's not my name that's at stake."

When we act in faith, we aren't risking our reputation; we are risking God's reputation because He's the one who made the promise in the first place. But if we aren't willing to risk our reputation, we'll never establish God's reputation. We'll also never experience miracles like the one Bob saw. Not only did God break the curse and resurrect the tree; it became the only tree of its type to yield its fruit, not once, but twice a year. A double crop! A double blessing!

Why do we mistakenly think that God is offended by our prayers for the impossible? The truth is that God is offended by anything less! God is offended when we ask Him to do things we can do ourselves. It's the impossible prayers that honor God because they reveal our faith and allow God to reveal His glory.

Shameless Audacity

In Luke 11, Jesus tells a story about a man who won't take no for an answer. He keeps knocking on his friend's door until he

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gets what he came for. It's a parable about prevailing in prayer. And Jesus honors his bold determination: "... yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need."

I love this depiction of prayer. There are times when you need to do whatever it takes. You need to grab hold of the horns of the altar and not let go. You need to dare demonic forces to a duel. You need to do something crazy, something risky, something different.

The epitome of shameless audacity is the circle maker himself. When a severe drought threatened to destroy a generation of Jews, Honi drew a circle in the sand, dropped to his knees, and said, "Lord of the universe, I swear before Your great name that I will not move from this circle until You have shown mercy upon Your children."

It was a risky proposition. Honi could have been in that circle a long time! But God honored that bold prayer because that bold prayer honored Him. And even when God answered that prayer for rain, Honi had the shameless audacity to ask for a specific type of rain. "Not for such rain have I prayed, but for rain of Your favor, blessing, and graciousness."

The moral of this parable is to prevail in prayer, but it also reveals the character of Him who answers prayer. The request is *not* granted simply because of repeated requests. Prayer is answered to preserve God's good name. After all, it's not our reputation that is on the line; it's His reputation. So God doesn't answer prayer just to give us what we want; God answers prayer to bring glory to His name.

Day 6: Shameless Audacity

The beauty of obedience is this: it relieves us of responsibility. It takes all the pressure off of us and places it squarely on God's sovereign shoulders.

When we give God the tithe, for example, our finances are no longer our responsibility; they become God's responsibility. God even says, "Test me in this." And if we test God, we'll find that He can do more with 90 percent than we can do with 100 percent. It turns financial management into a giving game that gets more fun the more we give. And the more we give away, the more we can enjoy what we keep.

When we pray, we relieve ourselves of responsibility. We let go and let God. We take our hands off and put our concerns into the hands of Almighty God. And trust me, He can handle whatever we put in His hands.

Sometimes we're afraid of praying for miracles because we're afraid that God won't answer, but the answer isn't up to us. We never know if the answer will be yes, no, or not yet. But the answer isn't up to us. It's not our job to answer; it's our job to ask. And Jesus exhorts us to ask.

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

These three words — *ask*, *seek*, and *knock* — are present imperative verbs. In other words, they aren't something we do once; they are actions that are repeated over and over and over again.

Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking.
And, I might add, keep circling!

Draw the Circle



*The greatest tragedy in life
is the prayers that go unanswered
simply because they go unasked.*

Day 7

Put on Waders

*They went forth and preached every where, the Lord ...
confirming the word with signs following.*

MARK 16:20 KJV

The first testimony I received after writing *The Circle Maker* — and one of my favorites — made reference to a drought in Mississippi fifty years ago. Not unlike Honi the circle maker, whose prayer ended a first-century drought in Israel, one man's faith rose to the occasion in the land of the Delta.

When a drought threatened to destroy a season of crops, a rural church with many farmers in the congregation called for an emergency prayer meeting. Dozens of farmers showed up to pray. Most of them wore their traditional overalls, but one of them wore waders! He got a few funny looks, just like Noah did when he was building the ark, but isn't that faith at its finest? If we genuinely believe God is going to answer our prayer for rain, isn't that exactly what we would wear? Why not dress for the miracle? I love the simple, childlike faith of that old, seasoned farmer. He simply said, "I don't want to walk home wet." And he didn't. But everyone else did.

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I can't help but wonder if that act of faith is what sealed the miracle. I don't know for sure, but this I do know: God is honored when we act *as if* He is going to answer our prayers! And acting *as if* means acting on our prayers. After hitting our knees, we need to take a small step of faith. And those small steps of faith often turn into giant leaps.

Like Noah, who kept building an ark day after day, we keep hammering away at the dream God has given us. Like the Israelites, who kept circling Jericho for seven days, we keep circling God's promises. Like Elijah, who kept sending his servant back to look for a rain cloud, we actively and expectantly wait for God's answer.

\$85 Faith

A year before we purchased the old crack house on Capitol Hill that we turned into Ebenezers Coffeehouse, I took an \$85 step of faith. And I believe this \$85 step of faith set us up for the \$3 million miracle that happened many years later.

I was at an auction where items were being sold off to benefit our children's school. Most people were bidding on class projects or tickets to sporting events or vacations. Not me. I had my eye on one item: a book on Capitol Hill zoning codes donated by the Capitol Hill Restoration Society.

I knew I could buy a copy for less money *after* we got a contract on the property, but I felt I needed to demonstrate my faith and purchase it *before* we got the contract. If we weren't able to get the property, it would be a complete waste of money. But I believed that God was going to give it to us,

Day 7: Put on Waders

so I acted on it by making an \$85 bid. I got the book, and a few months later we got the contract on the property.

Sometimes we need to take an \$85 step of faith just to show God that we're serious. It proves our faith.

Don't just pray about your dream; act on it. Act *as if* God is going to deliver on His promise. Maybe it's time to put on waders and act as if God is going to answer. Maybe it's time to make an \$85 down payment on your dream.

Buy a ticket to the Broadway show you're auditioning for. Buy a new suit for the dream job you've applied for. Buy a piece of furniture for the dream home you've been saving for. Buy a share of stock. Buy a subscription. Buy a book.

This isn't some "name it, claim it" scheme. If it's not in the will of God, if it's not for the glory of God, it's a waste of time, energy, and money. But if the dream is ordained by God, then that \$85 step of faith honors God. And God will honor your \$85 faith. Think of it as a down payment on your dream.

Signs Following

The last two words of Mark's gospel are "signs following."

We wish it said "signs preceding."

We want God to go first. That way we don't need to exercise any faith at all. But we've got it backward. If we want to see God move, we need to make a move. If it seems like God isn't moving in our lives, maybe it's because we aren't moving. But if we make a move, God will move heaven and earth to honor our faith.

There comes a moment when we need to make a statement

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of faith. I'm not talking about a collection of theological truths written on paper; I'm talking about a statement of faith written with our lives. *Faith* is not a noun; it's a verb — an action verb. The greatest and truest statement of faith is a life well lived. It is faith fleshed out through risks and sacrifices. It is daring to go after a dream that is destined to fail without divine intervention.

We can pray until our knees are numb, but if our praying isn't accompanied by acting, then we won't get anywhere. We need to put feet to our faith. After kneeling down, we need to stand up and step out in faith. There is an old adage: *the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step*. Based on my experience, that first step is always the hardest and longest step. It will require the most faith. It will feel the most awkward. But if we step out in faith, signs will follow. In fact, an avalanche of blessing will overtake us and overwhelm us. We'll be buried in God's blessings.

Wet Feet

When the Israelites were on the verge of entering the Promised Land, God commanded the priests to step into the river. It's one of the most counterintuitive commands in Scripture: "When you reach the banks of the Jordan River, take a few steps into the river."

I don't know about you, but I don't particularly like getting my feet wet. I'd much rather have God part the river, and then I'll step into the miracle. That way I don't get my feet wet,

Day 7: Put on Waders

but if we aren't willing to get our feet wet, we'll never walk through parted rivers on dry ground.

At flood tide, the Jordan River was approximately two hundred feet wide. That was all that separated the Israelites from their four-hundred-year-old promise. Their dream was practically a stone's throw away. But if the priests hadn't stepped into the river, they may well have spent the rest of their lives on the eastern banks of the Jordan River. And that's where many of us spend our lives. We're so close to the dream, so close to the promise, so close to the miracle. But we're waiting for God to part the river, while God is waiting for us to get our feet wet.

We'll never see God part the Jordan River if our feet are firmly planted on dry ground. But if we step into the river, God will part it.



*If you want to see God move,
make a move.*

Day 8

One God-Idea

“Speak to the earth, and it will teach you.”

JOB 12:8

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the agricultural economy of the South was suffering as the boll weevil devastated cotton crops. The soil was being depleted of nutrients because farmers planted cotton year in and year out.

Enter George Washington Carver, one of the most brilliant scientific minds of the twentieth century. Carver introduced the concept of crop rotation and encouraged farmers to plant peanuts instead of cotton. The rotation of crops revived the soil, but it didn't revive the economy because there was no market for peanuts. The abundant peanut crop rotted in warehouses because supply was greater than demand. When frustrated farmers complained to Carver, he did what he had always done: he took a long walk and had a long talk with God.

George Washington Carver routinely got up at 4:00 a.m., walked through the woods, and asked God to reveal the mysteries of nature. Job 12:7–8 was one of the most-circled promises in his Bible.

Day 8: One God-Idea

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;
or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish in the sea inform you.”

Carver took that promise at face value. He literally asked God to reveal the mysteries of nature. And God answered his prayer. Carver is famous for discovering more than three hundred uses for the peanut, but the genesis of those revelations was one conversation with God. In his own inimitable fashion, Carver shared the story behind the story.

I asked God, “Why did you make the universe, Lord?”

“Ask for something more in proportion to that little mind of yours,” replied God.

“Why did you make the earth, Lord?” I asked.

“Your little mind still wants to know far too much. Ask for something more in proportion to that little mind of yours,” replied God.

“Why did you make man, Lord?” I asked.

“Far too much. Far too much. Ask again,” replied God.

“Explain to me why you made plants, Lord,” I asked.

“Your little mind still wants to know far too much.”

“The peanut?” I asked meekly.

“Yes! For your modest proportions, I will grant you the mystery of the peanut. Take it inside your laboratory and separate it into water, fats, oils, gums, resins, sugars, starches, and amino acids. Then recombine these under my three laws of compatibility, temperature, and pressure. Then you will know why I made the peanut.”

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On January 20, 1921, George Washington Carver testified before the House Ways and Means Committee on behalf of the United Peanut Association of America. The chairman, Joseph Fordney of Michigan, told him he had ten minutes. An hour and forty minutes later, the committee told Carver he could come back whenever he wanted and take as much time as he needed. Carver mesmerized the committee by demonstrating a myriad of ingenious uses for the peanut — everything from glue to shaving cream to soap to insecticide to cosmetics to wood stains to fertilizer to linoleum to Worcestershire sauce.

The next time you shave or put on makeup, the next time you stain the deck or fertilize your garden, the next time you enjoy a good old-fashioned PBJ, remember that all of those things trace back to a man who had a habit of praying at 4:00 a.m.

Those three hundred uses of the peanut were *not* good ideas; they were God-ideas. And one God-idea is worth more than a thousand good ideas.

Good ideas are good, but only God-ideas change the course of history.

God-Ideas

Every year, we have an annual theme at National Community Church. It's not just some catchy phrase that rhymes with the year, like "Learning to Lean in 2013." It's the by-product of pressing into God's presence and discerning what God wants to do in us and through us. The theme this year is simply this: *Get into God's presence.*

Day 8: One God-Idea

That is the solution to every problem. That is the answer to every question.

We don't get a vision from God by going to conferences. We might get some good ideas, but God-ideas are only revealed in the presence of God.

Everyone needs counseling of some sort at some point in their lives, but our biggest problems are only solved in the presence of God.

Go ahead and do a planning meeting. After all, failing to plan is planning to fail. But don't just brainstorm; praystorm. The best plans are birthed in the presence of God.

At some point in our lives, the best we can do isn't good enough. Our best solutions, ideas, and efforts aren't good enough. That's when we need to hit our knees and trust God to do what only God can do. After all, *prayer is the difference between the best you can do and the best God can do*. And that's a big difference!

If we hit our knees, the Holy Spirit will do the heavy lifting. If we hit our knees, the Holy Spirit will reveal things that can only be discovered in the presence of God. If we hit our knees, the Holy Spirit will give us God-ideas for our ministry, family, business — for our lives.

The Solution to 10,000 Problems

The modern mystic A. W. Tozer believed that a low view of God is the cause of a hundred lesser evils, but a high view of God is the solution to ten thousand temporal problems. If that's true, and I believe it is, then your biggest problem

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isn't an impending divorce or a doctor's diagnosis or a failing business. Please understand, I'm not making light of your relational, financial, or health issues. I certainly don't want to minimize the overwhelming challenges you may be facing. But in order to regain a godly perspective on your problems, you must answer this question: *Are my problems bigger than God, or is God bigger than my problems?*

Our biggest problem is our small view of God. That is the cause of all lesser evils. And a high view of God is the solution to all other problems.

Until we come to the conviction that God's grace and God's power know no limits, we will draw small prayer circles. But once we embrace the omnipotence of God, we'll draw ever-enlarging circles around our God-given, God-sized dreams.

How big is your God?

Is He big enough to heal your marriage or heal your child?
Is He bigger than a positive MRI or a negative evaluation? Is
He bigger than your worst sin, greatest fear, or biggest dream?

If He is bigger than all of those things, then pray like it.



*One God-idea is worth more
than a thousand good ideas.*

Day 9

Dream Factory

*We take captive every thought
to make it obedient to Christ.*

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5

I have a friend who is out to change the world, one malnourished child at a time.

In fall 2008, Mark Moore was working on Capitol Hill after spending ten years in Africa as a missionary. That's when a briefing from a UNICEF representative changed the trajectory of his life. The rep shared about a revolutionary food supplement called RUTF — Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food — and showed a *60 Minutes* clip featuring Anderson Cooper, who called it “the most important advance ever to cure and treat malnutrition.” For Mark, discovering RUTF was like discovering the cure for cancer. It was more than a good idea; he knew it was a God-idea.

The primary ingredient in RUTF is peanut paste. Peanuts are high in calories and rich in proteins, which support the immune system. And the combination of vitamins and minerals are easily digestible for those whose stomachs have shrunk because of malnutrition. It's the perfect food, the miracle food.

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I'm not sure George Washington Carver knew that peanut paste would become the single greatest weapon in the fight against malnutrition, but God knew. And the revelation that saved the agricultural economy of the South a hundred years ago has the potential to save millions of lives today. That is the potential of one God-idea. That is the by-product of one prayer.

On October 16, 2009, Mark launched MANA, which stands for Mother Administered Nutritive Aid. But the acronym is really a double entendre. Like the manna that God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness, it's a miracle for those who receive it!

After stepping into the Jordan River and launching MANA, Mark set out to build a facility that could produce mass quantities of RUTF at cheap prices — but he knew God would have to part the waters. He targeted Georgia since it was the peanut capital of the country, and he identified a town called Fitzgerald. When he shared the vision of MANA with the mayor, the mayor said he'd do everything in his power to facilitate and expedite the building permits if Mark could raise \$1 million. One trip to Houston, and one angel donor, took care of the \$1 million. And within two weeks, they broke ground on a 30,000 square-foot facility that can produce up to 18,000 packets of RUTF every hour. Last month, MANA produced more than one million lifesaving packets!

Dream Factory

Now here's the rest of the story.

Not long after this God-idea got into his spirit, Mark sent

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me an e-mail with the subject line “A Million Lives Saved at Ebenezers.” That got my attention! Mark explained that the vision for MANA was conceived at our coffeehouse. And the official launch, which took place on World Food Day, happened at Ebenezers as well. So I felt like an accomplice to a holy conspiracy.

Then I remembered a prayer we had prayed many years before. And I connected the dots between that prophetic prayer and its fulfillment.

On March 13, 2006, we dedicated Ebenezers Coffeehouse to the Lord. We laid hands on the walls, wrote prayers on the floors, and prayed for every person who would walk through our doors — which would have included Mark.

The most memorable moment, however, was when one of our staff members specifically prayed that Ebenezers would be a *dream factory*. It was one of those moments when you almost open your eyes during prayer to see if it impacted everyone else the same way. It was a specific prayer, a prophetic prayer. This one prayer has been answered hundreds of times since it was first prayed. And Mark is an example of how God can answer one prayer in a way that will affect millions of lives. This is what Mark wrote:

The dream of MANA was formed in the dream factory of Ebenezers Coffeehouse. Its great coffee and free Wi-Fi made for the perfect office. As that dream began to gel and I began to pull together resources and relationships to pursue the dream, Ebenezers became the meeting place. Meeting after meeting occurred there. Many were planned and scheduled, as in “meet me at Ebenezers at 2:00 p.m.,” but many more

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happened by accident. Those meetings led to new ideas, new partnerships, new opportunities, and new relationships that eventually brought us to where we are today.

Severe acute malnutrition will not be stopped by one organization putting peanut paste in a pouch, but we can launch the greatest attack ever on malnutrition and the needless death it brings.

This idea, conceived in Mark's spirit at Ebenezers Coffee-house, was more than a good idea; it was a God-idea. And when you get a God-idea, you need to take it captive. In the words of Paul, "Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Growing up, I consistently heard this verse interpreted in negative terms. Take captive sinful thoughts and make them obedient to Christ. And that is half the battle. But if we see only the negative implications and not the positive possibilities, it becomes a half-truth. This verse is not just about capturing sinful thoughts and getting them out of our minds; it's also about capturing creative thoughts and keeping them in our minds. It means stewarding every word, thought, impression, and revelation inspired by the Spirit of God.

The first half is taking captive every thought. One of the best ways to capture thoughts is a prayer journal. The second half is making it obedient to Christ — and that requires blood, sweat, and tears.

When I was nineteen years old, I heard a message about Benaiah, King David's bodyguard who chased a lion into a pit on a snowy day and killed it. When I listened to that message, a thought fired across my synapses: *If I ever write a book, I*

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want to write one about that verse in the Bible. I held captive that thought for nineteen years! Then I made it obedient to Christ by setting my alarm very early in the morning, sitting down at my keyboard, and writing a book titled *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day*. That book started out as a God-idea, but writing it was an act of obedience.

Nolan Bushnell, the creator of the Atari video game system, once stated, “Everyone who’s ever taken a shower has had an idea. It’s the person who gets out of the shower, dries off, and does something about it who makes a difference.”



*Never underestimate the power
of a single prayer.*

Day 10

Crazy Faith

“This woman is driving me crazy.”

LUKE 18:5 NLT

I love the parable of the persistent widow. I don't mean any disrespect, but I think *persistent* is a nice word for *crazy*. This woman is crazy, but when the cause is a righteous one, it's a holy crazy!

We aren't told what injustice took place, but she was on a mission. Maybe her son was falsely imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit. Maybe the man who molested her daughter was still on the streets. We don't know for sure. But whatever it was, she wouldn't take no for an answer. And the judge knew it. The judge knew she would circle his house until the day she got justice or the day she died. The judge knew there was no quit in the crazy woman.

Does *the Judge* know that about you?

How desperate are you for the blessing, the breakthrough, the miracle? Desperate enough to pray through the night? How many times are you willing to circle the promise? Until the day you die? How long will you knock on the door of

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opportunity? Until your knuckles are raw? Until you knock the door down?

Like Honi the circle maker, the persistent widow's methodology was unorthodox. She could have, and technically should have, waited for her day in court. Going to the personal residence of the judge crossed a professional line. I'm almost surprised the judge didn't file a restraining order against her. But this reveals something about the nature of God. *God couldn't care less about protocol.* If He did, Jesus would have chosen the Pharisees as His disciples. But that isn't who Jesus honored.

Jesus honored the prostitute who crashed a party at a Pharisee's home to anoint His feet. Jesus honored the tax collector who climbed a tree in his three-piece suit just to get a glimpse of Him. Jesus honored the four friends who cut in line and cut a hole in someone's ceiling to help their friend. And in this parable, Jesus honored the crazy woman who drove a judge crazy because she wouldn't stop knocking.

The common denominator in each of these stories is crazy faith. People took desperate measures to get to God, and God honored them for it. Nothing has changed. God is still honoring spiritual desperadoes who crash parties and climb trees. God is still honoring those who defy protocol with their bold prayers. God is still honoring those who pray with audacity and tenacity. And the crazy woman is selected as the gold standard when it comes to praying hard. Her unrelenting persistence was the only difference between justice and injustice.

The viability of our prayers is not contingent on scrabbling

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the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet into the right combinations like *abracadabra*. God already knows the last punctuation mark before we pronounce the first syllable. The viability of our prayers has more to do with intensity than vocabulary. It has more to do with what we do than what we say.

Don't just pray about it; act on it.

There are defining moments in life when we need to prove to God that we mean business — and I don't mean “business as usual.” In fact, it's only when “business as usual” goes out of business that we're in business — the Father's business. That's when we're on the verge of a spiritual breakthrough.

Crazy Is Normal

Josh Sexton pastors a church plant in North Carolina called Relevant Truth Church. God is doing amazing things at RTC. People who wouldn't darken the doorway of a church are finding a relationship with Jesus Christ at an indoor skate park that has been converted into a sanctuary. But like many church plants, there is more vision than money. RTC was facing the termination of their lease if they couldn't come up with the \$3,500 rent when Josh got an idea while reading *The Circle Maker*. One of the leaders at RTC relayed what happened.

Josh asked me to come to the front during a worship service. He handed me a can of spray paint and asked me to paint a circle on stage. That's when Josh told us he wasn't going

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to leave the circle until God made provision for the church. With his wife's blessing, he brought in a bed and ordered a Port-a-John. All he had was his Bible and his prayer journal. Three times a day, his wife brings him meals. My wife and I live down the street, so we're helping with the kids.

I think Josh came to the place of desperation. If this thing was going to work, God was going to have to show up and show off. I really think he is planning on staying in that circle until God does something huge. Crazy huh?

Crazy?

Or maybe it's not crazy!

Maybe our normal is so subnormal that normal seems abnormal. Maybe we need a new normal. Bold prayers and big dreams are normal. Anything less is subnormal. And when bold prayers become the norm, so do the miraculous breakthroughs that follow.

I know there may be naysayers who find fault with Josh's approach, but sometimes you need to do something crazy, something risky, something dramatic. That's what Honi the circle maker did when he drew a circle in the sand and declared that he wouldn't come out until it rained. The Sanhedrin almost excommunicated him because they thought his prayer was too bold. But you cannot argue with a miracle, can you? His radical prayer resulted in rain. And Honi was ultimately honored for "the prayer that saved a generation."

For the record, the Sanhedrin still exists in every organization, every denomination, and every church. But don't let the nitpickers and naysayers keep you from doing something

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crazy if you know God has called you to do it. For the record, RTC didn't just get a new lease on their building; they got a new lease on their faith!

There is a pattern repeated in Scripture: crazy miracles are the offspring of crazy faith. Normal begets normal. Crazy begets crazy. If we want to see God do crazy miracles, sometimes we need to pray crazy prayers.



***Bold prayers honor God and
God honors bold prayers.***
