



Drawing a Circle

I believe prayer is the difference between the best you can do and the best God can do. It's the difference between letting things happen and making things happen. It's the difference between you fighting for God and God fighting for you. Over the next forty days, we're going to pray like it depends on God and work like it depends on us. And I believe that God is going to show up and show off His power, His grace, His goodness. Welcome to the forty-day prayer challenge.

MARK BATTERSON

First Thoughts

Rodney “Gypsy” Smith was born on the outskirts of London in 1860. At the age of sixteen, he made a decision to follow Christ and taught himself to read and write so he could start preaching the message of Jesus. He would often sing hymns to the people he met, earning him the nickname of the “singing gypsy boy.”

In time, Gypsy began serving in various missions organizations in England, including the Salvation Army. He 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. It seemed as if everywhere he went, revival was right on his heels.

At one point, Gypsy 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.”

When was the last time you prayed that way?

When you pray fervently and brokenly, the heavenly Father hears your heart. But I would add “consistently” to the equation. So, at the beginning of this forty-day journey, I want to challenge you to pick a *time* and pick a *place* to pray. If it helps, draw a circle somewhere. Or use a hula hoop. Or map out a prayer route that you walk each day. Or write your prayer requests in a journal and circle them. And as you pray *fervently*, *brokenly*, and *consistently*, I encourage you to pray with the *authority* that is yours as a child of God.

As we will discuss this week, God is not a genie in a bottle, and your wish is not His command. Your prayer must meet a

twofold litmus test—the *will* of God and the *glory* of God. But if they do, you will pray with the full authority of the King and His kingdom. It's your positional authority in Christ that gives you a holy confidence as you pray.

In Matthew 18:18, Jesus says, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven." The word *bind* has a legal connotation. It means "to place a contract on something." This is precisely what happens when you pray in the will of God. You are exercising our authority as believers to stake claim to the promises of God—and those are the kind of prayers that honor God.

Circling things in prayer is binding them on earth.

What do you need to start circling?

Getting Started

Before watching session 1, as a group read, pray, and meditate (RPM) on Joshua 1:1–11:

¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

⁷ “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

¹⁰ So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹ “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.’”

Take a few minutes to pray and meditate on this passage; then write down your personal reflections. What was one thing that stood out to you from the Scripture? In what ways does that represent a new insight for you?

Watch the Video

Play the video for session 1. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

God's promise to Joshua—and to us

The litmus test for our prayers

Our authority through prayer

The significance of “forty” in Scripture

The goal of the forty-day challenge

The importance of finding a time, a place, and a problem

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Group Discussion

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. At the beginning of this session, I share about my favorite place to pray: the rooftop of Ebenezers Coffeehouse. Where is your favorite place to pray? Is there a place where you pray with a little more faith because of a miracle God has already done? Explain.

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2. Have you ever done a forty-day challenge before—whether forty days of prayer, forty days of purpose, or even a forty-day fast of some sort? What was your experience like? Are there any lessons you learned that will help you this time around?

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3. If you've never done a forty-day challenge, what are your hopes or concerns?

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4. Reread **Joshua 1:3**. In the video, I share how when I read this verse, God prompted me to do a 4.7-mile prayer walk around the perimeter of Capitol Hill. Have you ever had a promise "jump off" the pages of Scripture and into your spirit? What is a promise you've circled in prayer during some season of life?

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5. Read **Matthew 18:18** and **Hebrews 4:16**. What instructions regarding prayer do we receive in these verses? In what ways are we to pray?

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6. The primary purpose of prayer is not to change our circumstances; the primary purpose of prayer is to change *us*. Have you ever tried to "pray away" something? Is there

an unanswered prayer that, in retrospect, you're glad God *didn't* answer?

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Personal Reflection

Conclude today's session by reflecting on these questions on your own.

1. If you don't know what you want to get out of this forty-day prayer challenge, you probably won't get much out of it. So take a few minutes to brainstorm the people, problems, or promises you want to circle in prayer. Maybe it's a dream that has gathered dust. Perhaps it's a problem that is beyond your ability to solve. Or maybe it's a promise you need to believe God for once again. Write down a short list—three things—that you want to circle in prayer.

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2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your current prayer life? Do your prayers tend to be infrequent or reserved for emergency situations? Or are you praying consistently?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

RARELY PRAY

CONSISTENTLY PRAY

3. Gratitude is thanking God *after* He does something. Faith is thanking God *before* He does it. What is something you need to begin thanking God for—as if He’s already done it in your life?

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4. Prayer is a *team* sport. Who can you invite into your prayer circle, to partner with you in prayer? Try to identify an Aaron and a Hur—someone who will lift your hands. Then identify a Moses, someone you want to provide prayer support to.

An Aaron / Hur:

A Moses:

Next Steps

In *Draw the Circle*, I discuss the importance of journaling and state that you need to “journal like a journalist.” If you don’t have a journal, *get* a journal. You will need it to write out your prayers so you have a record of the things you circle during this forty-day challenge.

Remember that prayer isn’t about outlining our agenda to God. It’s about getting into His presence and His Word and discerning His agenda for *you*. So, at the beginning of this study, pray about what to pray about. Then take time to listen. Listen to your life. Listen to family and friends. Listen to the still small voice of the Holy Spirit.

Don’t rush the listening phase of this process. Don’t be afraid of silence. And resolve to do more listening than talking. Put Psalm 46:10 into practice: “Be still, and know that I am God.”

As you read through the passages we will discuss in the book of Joshua, ask God if there is a promise He wants you to circle. While you watch the video segments or read *Draw the Circle*, pay close attention to the things that stir your spirit or spark an idea.

It's okay if it takes the first few days or even the first few weeks of the forty-day challenge to identify what it is you want to circle in prayer. Once you identify the person or problem or promise you want to pray for, write that in the circle.



Draw^{the} Circle

DAILY REFLECTIONS

Session 1 Personal Study

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 during this study: *find out about prayer*. My prayer for you is that each day on this journey will yield a new discovery—and that those discoveries will change the way you pray. And when you change the way you pray, everything else changes.

This week, as part of your forty-day challenge, I encourage you to read days 1 to 7 in *Draw the Circle*—one reading each day—and use the questions in this section to reflect on what you’ve read. Be sure to note these reflections in this guide or your journal, as there will be a time at the beginning of next week’s session to share your thoughts with the group.

Day 1: Get Ready

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

1. Read **Acts 10:1-8**. What do you learn about Cornelius's prayer habits in this passage? How did this open the door for *irregular* things to happen to him?

2. What are some ways that God has invaded the routine of your life as you have sought Him consistently in prayer?

3. What are some of the dangers of trying to “manufacture your own miracles” instead of waiting for God to act in His timing?

Day 2: Established by God

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KEY TAKEAWAY: God is great not just because nothing is too big for Him; God is also great because nothing is too small.

1. Read **Proverbs 16:9**. How does this verse assure you that God has everything under control? What does it say about our plans versus God's plan?

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2. None of us doubts God's ability to handle the "big things," like keeping the planets in order. But what are some of the "small things" in your life that you tend to doubt God's ability to handle?

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3. What is one small, practical step of obedience that you could take today to show God that you trust Him in the small things?

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Day 3: Amazing Things

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KEY TAKEAWAY: If we give more of ourselves to God, God will give more of Himself to us.

1. Read **Matthew 26:36–39**. How did Jesus demonstrate that He was surrendering His will to God’s plan in this passage?

2. What are some “Garden of Gethsemane” moments in your life where you’ve had to submit your plans to God?

3. What are some things in your life—talent, time, treasure—that you still need to surrender to the lordship of Christ?

Day 4: Don't Pray Away

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

1. Read **John 9:1–5**. How did Jesus “set the record straight” about why the man in this story had been born blind?

2. What is the difference between *praying away* and *praying through*? Which types of these prayers do you tend to pray?

3. What is a situation in your life where you saw God change *you* through it rather than simply make the problem go away?

Day 5: Write It Down

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KEY TAKEAWAY: The shortest pencil is longer than the longest memory.

1. Read **Habakkuk 2:2–3**. What reasons did God give to Habakkuk as to why he should write down the revelations that he was receiving?

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2. What do you do to document what God has been doing in your life?

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3. What are some things in your life that—as you look back now—you can see how God carefully determined your steps?

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Day 6: Shameless Audacity

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

1. Read **Luke 11:5–8**. What was Jesus’s point in telling this parable?

2. What are some examples of times when you’ve prayed with “shameless audacity”?

3. What are some areas in which you need to hand over the control to God?

Day 7: Put on Waders

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KEY TAKEAWAY: If you want to see God move, make a move.

1. Read **Matthew 14:25–33**. What does this story tell you about stepping out in faith *first* to witness God move?

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2. How have you seen God move in your life when you were willing to step out in faith?

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3. What small step of faith do you feel God is calling you to take today?

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