

Pray Hard

By definition, praying hard is hard. In God's kingdom, prayer is the heavy lift. But prayer is the difference between "good ideas" and "God-ideas." It's the difference between closed doors and open doors. It's the difference between impossible and possible. But you can't just pray like it depends on God. You also have to work like it depends on you. What I mean by that is this: you can't just talk the talk—you also have to walk the walk.

MARK BATTERSON

First Thoughts

We have a tendency to confuse our job and God's job. We want to do amazing things for God, but that isn't our job. That's God's job! He is the One who does amazing things for us. Our job is to *consecrate* ourselves. And if we do our job, God is going to do His job.

A key piece of that consecration process is prayer. And that means not just "praying for" but "praying through." Prayer is the difference between us fighting for God and God fighting for us. God wants to fight our battles for us, but we have to pray through till the breakthrough. As Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8).

The story of God delivering on His promise to Abraham and Sarah in the book of Genesis is a quick and easy read. It only takes a few minutes to get from God's promise to make them "into a great nation" (12:2) to the fulfillment when Sarah "bore a son to Abraham in his old age" (21:2). But Abraham and Sarah weren't *reading it*, they were *living it*. Those twenty-five years had to feel like an eternity! How did they endure?

In Romans 4:18, Paul provides the answer: "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed." Is there a situation in your life where you need to not just hope, but *hope against hope*—to pitch your tent in the land of hope? Is there some situation that requires more than just "praying for," but actually "praying through"?

It's time to hit your knees, and then hang on to the promise in Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion."

Getting Started

Before watching session 3, as a group read, pray, and meditate (RPM) on Joshua 3:1-8:

¹ Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. ² After three days the officers went throughout the camp, ³ giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the Levitical priests carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. ⁴ Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about two thousand cubits between you and the ark; do not go near it."

⁵ Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."

⁶ Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them.

⁷ And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. ⁸ Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'"

Take a minute 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?

Now take a few moments to review any reflections you recorded from the readings (days 8–14) you completed in Draw the Circle during the week. What are some of the insights you wrote down that you would like to share with the group?

Watch the Video

Play the video for session 3. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

We're only two feet from revival.

A definition of faith

What it means to be consecrated to God

Faith is taking the first step.

Pray like it depends on God, but work like it depends on you.

Prayer must lead to action.

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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. Have you ever “contended” for something in prayer? If so, what happened?

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2. In the video, I tell the story of a young Billy Graham, who, while visiting the childhood home of John Wesley, prayed, “O Lord, do it again!” What are some revivals you need God to “do again” in your life? What do you need Him to do in your family’s lives?

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3. Read **Matthew 5:23–24**. Jesus tells us to leave our gift at the altar if someone has something against us and be reconciled.

Has God ever interrupted you while you were praying? Have you ever experienced this kind of prompting during prayer?

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4. In the video, I note that one of the great mistakes we make is asking God to do for us what He wants us to do for Him. Have you ever made that mistake? Explain.

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5. Read **Mark 16:20**. The last words of Mark's Gospel are "signs following" (KJV) or "signs that accompanied it" (NIV). Have you ever had God give you a sign confirming something you believe He asked you to do? What made you think it was from God?

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6. How did receiving this sign from God affect your faith? How did it impact your life?

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Personal Reflection

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

1. There is a distinction between "praying for" and "praying through." On a scale of 1–10, rate how you would characterize your prayer life right now.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

PRAY FOR

PRAY THROUGH

2. There are some things you don't need to pray about—you just need to go do them. Is there something you need to stop praying about and start doing something about?

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3. One of my prayer mantras is, "Lord, surprise me!" What would this prayer look like in your life? What are some ways that God could "surprise" you? (Try praying this prayer this week. Ask God to surprise you, and keep your eyes open for supernatural synchronicities. Be ready to share with the group how God answers that prayer!)

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4. If you are waiting to do something God has asked you to do because you feel you are not ready, there's a good chance you'll be waiting the rest of your life. In other words, you'll never be ready! Is there something God has called you to do, but you've delayed obedience because you're not sure if you're ready? What is it?

Next Steps

In Joshua 3:8, God gives the people a curious command: "Go and stand in the river."

We want God to part the river before we step into it so we don't have to get our feet wet, but God wants us to take a step of faith. And that's where most of us get stuck spiritually. We're waiting for God to make a move, while God is waiting for us to make a move!

Faith is taking the first step before God reveals the second step. We can't just pray like it depends on God—we also have to work like it depends on us. After we kneel and pray, we've got to get up and take a step of faith. We have to step into the Jordan River!

The Bible wasn't just meant to be read. It was meant to be prayed through, meditated on, and acted upon! We have to employ the action-oriented approach to Scripture advocated by Peter Marshall, who said, "I wonder what would happen if we all agreed to read one of the Gospels, until we came to a place that told us to do something, then went out to do it, and only after we had done it . . . began reading again?"

Why not give that a try this week?

Ebenezers Coffeehouse has served more than a million customers and given more than one million dollars in net profits to kingdom causes. But it started out as an eighty-five-dollar step of faith at an auction. I placed a bid on a book outlining zoning rules and regulations. I knew I could buy a copy for less money *after* I got a contract on the property, but I felt I needed to demonstrate my faith and purchase the book *before* we got the contract.

If we hadn't been able to get the property, it would have been a complete waste of money. But I believed that God was going to give it to us, so I acted on it by making that eighty-five-dollar bid. I got the book—and a few months later, we got the contract on the property.

What step of faith do you need to take?

What river do you need to step into?

Draw^{the} Circle

DAILY REFLECTIONS

Session 3 Personal Study

This week, as part of your forty-day challenge, I encourage you to read days 15 to 21 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 15: Contend for Me

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KEY TAKEAWAY: Prayer is the difference between you fighting for God and God fighting for you.

1. Read **Psalm 35:1, 23**. What do these verses say about the way God contends for you when you are fighting for His cause?

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2. What does it look like in your life to let God fight your battles for you? How easy or difficult is it for you to give up your problems to God?

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3. What is the problem with engaging in the combat of criticism? Why does this tend to be a no-win situation for everyone involved?

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Day 16: Lord, Surprise Me

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KEY TAKEAWAY: God always has a holy surprise up His sovereign sleeve.

1. Read **Acts 12:5–16**. How did God surprise the believers who had been praying?

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2. In what ways would asking God to “surprise you” be a dangerous prayer? What would it require on your part to honestly say this prayer to God?

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3. How has prayer added an element of surprise to your life? What other surprises are you asking God to provide for you?

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Day 17: Do Not Delay

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KEY TAKEAWAY: God is never early. God is never late. God is always right on time.

1. Read **Numbers 23:19**. What does this verse say about God and His promises?

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2. If you stand *on* God's Word, God will stand *by* His Word. What are some promises from God that you can pray with holy confidence?

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3. Why do you think God sometimes delays in answering our prayers? What value have you seen in praying ALAT ("as long it takes") kinds of prayers?

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Day 18: Keep Circling

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KEY TAKEAWAY: If you don't get out of the boat, you'll never walk on water.

1. Read **2 Chronicles 20:15–17**. How did the Lord encourage His people in the face of an overwhelming army that was marching against them?

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2. When is a time God has encouraged you to persevere when you have wanted to give up? How has God proven the battle was *His* to fight?

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3. What is potentially at stake if you *don't* keep circling in prayer for something God has put on your heart?

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Day 19: Memorial Offerings

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KEY TAKEAWAY: Our prayers don't die when we do. God answers them forever.

1. Read **Psalm 141:2**. How are our prayers like an offering to God?

2. How do you respond to the thought that your prayers live on after you die? How does this affect the way you think about prayer?

3. How are you making intercessory prayer part of the spiritual DNA of your family?

Day 20: Go. Set. Ready.

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KEY TAKEAWAY: If you are looking for excuses, you will always find one.

1. Read **Hebrews 11:8–12**. How did God honor Abraham's faith when he answered God's call "even though he did not know where he was going"?

2. How do you balance making wise plans and taking a risk to step out in faith? Recall a time God prompted you to act even when you didn't feel fully prepared.

3. What is the first step or next step you need to take in the journey God has called you to travel? What are you doing to move in that direction?

Day 21: Set Your Foot

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KEY TAKEAWAY: God is not a genie in a bottle, and your wish is not His command. His command better be your wish.

1. Read **James 1:5–6**. How are you instructed to pray in these verses?

2. Drawing prayer circles starts with discerning what God wants. How have you been seeking His discernment as you've circled items during this forty-day challenge?

3. What are some other areas God has prompted you to “lay claim to” as you’ve undertaken this challenge?
