

40 DAY  
**PRAYER**  
CHALLENGE

*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth,  
do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert. Isaiah 43: 19*

When I was a boy one of my favorite things to do was to play fort in my backyard. The house was made of wood and was a small replica of a colonial house big enough for a group of kids to fit inside, and sturdy enough to serve as central command for many make-believe battles. After each winter my buddies and I would spend time fixing up the house. One year we laid new floor boards, the next we would patch holes in the roof, another we would firm up the windows.

My hope for this 40 Day Prayer Challenge is that you will learn to play 'fort' with your faith. You need a place that you can go to be with your heavenly father and prayer is that place. Prayer offers you a chance to hear your heavenly father's wisdom for life, prayer can give you clearer vision for the battles ahead, and prayer builds a stronger spiritual foundation so that you can stand on the will of God in midst of daily agendas.

Perhaps you have an established rhythm of daily prayer, great, adding this new routine might firm up portions of your spiritual life that will keep your routine new. If you have trouble with maintaining any sense of continuity in your prayer life, you are not alone, this challenge might be for you a new set of floorboards offering firm footing for faith. Regardless of where you believe your faith to be, I believe a whole new world of spiritual vitality is within your reach.

In his devotional book, Draw the Circle, Mark Batterson writes insightfully the challenge for anyone interested in plumbing the depths of the spiritual disciplines.

*Spiritual growth is a conundrum. The key to spiritual growth is developing healthy and holy routines called spiritual disciplines. But once the routine becomes routine, we need to change the routine. Why? Because sacred routines become empty rituals if we do them out of left-brain memory instead of right-brain imagination.*

Each day I will reflect on the devotions found in this remarkable book. You should buy it and use it to aid you in your walk (though not required). I will add context from my perspective and challenge you to think differently about one aspect of prayer each day. I will also use our time together to ask for your prayers for Bethany. We have an exciting future together, I hope I can trust you with these important prayers.

You can find the daily posts on our Facebook page. Feel free to respond to the prayers there or email me (pastor.jon@bethanyelkhorn.org) if you would like. We would love to document God's movement in the life of the congregation. We have timed this challenge with the season of Lent. Lent is a time that God's people add a spiritual discipline to better capture the beauty of the resurrected life. With big prayers ahead, may you be richly blessed by the new thing that the Spirit of the Living God is resurrecting in and through you!



Jon

# 40 DAY PRAYER CHALLENGE

## Day 1: Get Ready

*He prayed to God regularly. Acts 10:2*

We don't talk about divine appointments much because it sounds like divine puppetry. Even though it's beyond our comprehension of how God uses our freewill, truth is, God invades our routine when we begin to pray. And as much as I like to take credit for the accomplishments in my life, if I am honest, I can look back and see that there were too many supernatural synchronicities in my successes to take credit. Mark writes "The plans of God are only revealed in the presence of God."

**Personal Growth:** Today, pray for God's presence to invade your routine. Pray that prayer five different times and five different ways. Something like this; "Lord, invade my routine today. God, surprise me with your presence today. God breaks into my busyness today. God get my attention in a new way today. God makes me laugh at the obvious way you show up today.

**Bethany Growth:** We are planning for prayer ministers to join our congregation after each worship service beginning Ash Wednesday. Please pray that those who are hurting and needing to know God's whisper of assurance will find such a whisper in our prayer ministers.

## Day 2: Established by God

*In their hearts, humans plan their course, But the Lord establishes their steps. Proverbs 16:9*

Occasionally, I must remind my children that communication is a two-way street. If a voicemail is left with no return, or a text is sent without a response, then the task of communication has yet to be completed. Likewise, prayer is not really prayer unless it is a two-way street. So many times, we lose our motivation for prayer because we don't allow enough room in our plans for God to answer. Instead of engaging the day with expectancy, we launch into the day and then feel frustrated that God isn't keeping up. Mark's reflection includes this insight. "God wants us to get where God wants us to go more than we want to get where God wants us to go. Our job is to hear His voice. His job is to establish our steps. And if we do our job, God will do His!"

**Personal Growth:** Ask God to make your ears so big that you will hear prayers answered. Ask God to remove the barriers from being a willing follower. As you work through your day, make listening through your day, your number one job of the day.

**Bethany Growth:** Pray that our strategic plans are centered on God's plans for our mission. Pray that the vision of creating a church where people curious about faith discover the joy of faith will become a reality this week.

### **Day 3: Amazing Things**

*Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you. Joshua 3:5*

For most of my twenty years of ministry, I have worked hard for the Church and on the Church. But something Mark Batterson wrote in today's devotion struck a chord. "We try to do things for God instead of letting God do things for us." I think I have been guilty of doing my best to help God with the church when really it works the other way around. That when I let God do things for me, it equips me to respond in far more faithful ways. To consecrate is to "set aside" or "set apart" for a purpose. In our baptism, God has consecrated you and me for a special purpose, but we must come to a complete surrender to his direction. When we do, we can begin to see the amazing things God can do through us.

*Personal Growth:* Try using the word *surrender* over and over in your time with God. Repeat it loudly or softly or quietly over the course of 5 minutes. Let your wandering thoughts come and go so that your mind's eye settles on the light of God's face. "I surrender to you, Lord. You are the one true and powerful leader and lord of my life."

*Bethany Growth:* Pray that Bethany as a community will find a second pastor, or that that pastor might find Bethany. "Lord, bring forth the one who will share in the joy of privilege of leading this great congregation."

### **Day 4: Don't Pray Away**

*This happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. John 9:3*

In my former life, I was a sales representative in the textile industry. I remember one season of anxiety that entangled me so much that the only way I could get to sleep at night was to put my Bible under the pillow so that I could be close to God's Word of assurance. We so want to avoid those seasons that we forget that God wants us to learn from our difficult seasons of life.

*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 are always trying to pray ourselves out of problems, we could short-circuit God's perfect plan.

*Personal Growth:* Take the problems of your day and pray for God to move you through in such a way that you learn and grow. Name three problems that are beyond your control and submit them in this way to God's providential plan.

*Bethany Growth:* We do have space problems. When September rolls around our classrooms are stuffed. Good problem. Pray that God will show up in a special way and make provision for these problems.

### **Day 5: Sunday**

## Day 6: Write It Down

*Write down the revelation. Habakkuk 2:2*

I have only recently come back to journaling. It is a way that I can turn my prayers into offerings that go deeper than my usual grunts and growls in the morning. I am better able to articulate my heartfelt dreams and imaginations to God. Throughout Mark Batterson's writing, he reminds us of a lesson Jesus taught about prayer; "that we are to pray as if it all depends on God, and work like it all depends on us." That means praying with detail. Don't just pray that you will have a good day, pray that the conversation you know you must have with that person you are avoiding will be blessed. In fact, pray for that person and you may be surprised just how blessed difficult conversations will become.

*Personal Growth:* Write down your prayers. Get a computer or handwrite, whichever is easier, and start documenting your life with God. Don't forget to write the answers to the prayers you see.

*Bethany Growth:* Pray for more and more people to know God's love. We believe God is preparing everyone to receive a greater portion of fieldwork. The work that is yet to be done to show and tell others of the good news of God's activity.

## Day 7: Shameless Audacity

*... yet because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. Luke 11:8*

One thing that I am learning to do is to offer God prayers that are beyond my resources. I sometimes can forget that prayer should be a "calculated risk." When we traveled to Costa Rica last year, Christian, a missionary serving in a gang-dominated neighborhood of San Jose shared his journey. Before he moved his family, he told me, he prayed that the only way he would go is if God would show up big and provide. And indeed, God did, and still does. Christian wakes up each day not knowing where the food will come to feed the men taking shelter in their church. These are men who are trying to escape the street gangs and have found a temporary bed where they hear the gospel message preached and can clean up. Not a day goes by that some type of mysterious out-of-nowhere event occurs. When we were there, several fish and a huge bag of bread (not kidding) were brought in because a local market shared. In our prayers, we need to claim a promise from God for something only God can do.

*Personal Growth:* What prayer request is so big that you need God to show up? What big thing is on your heart that you believe God is calling you to do, but you don't have the resources or courage to pursue it? Start praying about it, about why you believe God will be glorified when answered.

*Bethany Growth:* Pray for our partner church in Costa Rica, that God will continue to provide, and that Christian might remain strong in the Lord. Pray for the upcoming mission trip and that more and more people will be able to participate.