

40 DAY
PRAYER
CHALLENGE

Day 19: Go, Set, Ready

He (Abraham) did not know where he was going. Hebrews 11:8

I ran from the call to full time ministry. I'd spent five successful years in business in my mid-twenties, but a change was needed. I prayed to find a new career, I prayed to find a new church, I didn't expect God to answer both prayers with the same idea. Fulltime ministry terrified and excited me, so much so that I spent a full year waiting tables hoping the call would simply go away. It didn't. Still unsure after a year, I began to

interview for different positions back in my industry. I remember sitting in one interview and every fiber in my being screamed, "you are going the wrong way!"

In his devotion Mark Batterson writes that sometimes we need to take a step without knowing what the next step will be. God called Abraham to move to a strange land, and Abraham took the first step even though he didn't know the final destination. And God honored it.

"If you take the first step, God will reveal the second step. The problem is that most of us want the twenty-five -year plan before we're willing to step out in faith. But God doesn't operate that way. He gives us just enough revelation, just enough grace, just enough strength. Why? So, we will live in daily dependence on Him. He doesn't want us to rely on the revelation; he wants us to rely on him."

Personal Growth: What dream, what relationship conversation, what opportunity do you need to take a first step? As followers, we are to take a "why-not" approach to life. In God's economy there is no such thing as failure when you take that first step of faith.

Bethany Growth: Pray for the flood victims in Valley and Waterloo. That our church might become a service center to launch teams of people to supply hands-on, long-term recovery efforts in the name of Jesus.

Day 20: Set Your Foot

"I'm giving you every square inch of the land you set your foot on." Joshua 1:3

Learning how to pray is important because we can accidentally default into approaching God like a vending machine. Imagine God giving you every sweet prayer you ask for, when you want it and how you want it. Might taste sweet, for a second. But God knows better than to spoil his children.

Mark Batterson writes that prayer "starts with discerning what God wants, what God wills." The more time we spend in prayer on that question the sooner we will see as God sees. Each morning our Bethany staff takes time in chapel praying through the A.C.T.S. acronym. ACTS is a rhythm of prayer that centers our prayers in God's will.

Personal Growth: Begin your prayers today by simply imagining God's glorious and brilliant presence in your mind's eye. ADORE his radiant love and repeat a single phrase to purge competing thoughts and center your focus (Lord, you are my everything). Next, after quieting your soul CONFESS. After a time revealing your broken condition, give THANKS. God has created and sustained you because God believes in you and your purpose is important for His kingdom work. SUPPLICATION. Now, ask God for what you need in order to steward his glorious kingdom into being (think restoration of relationships, people, communities, businesses, etc.). Remember, it's about what God wants, and when we pray around the promises of God, God is honored, and prayers are answered.

Bethany Growth: Pray for our prayer ministers today. These men and women are offering prayers to any and all who are interested in prayer after each worship service. Pray for those who need prayer but don't want to ask for it. Too many of us seek an autonomous life thinking the less dependent we become the better life becomes. Don't go it alone.

Day 21: Prayer Fleece

"I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor." Judges 6:37

One of my favorite hobbies is mountain biking. Even in Nebraska there are 'mountainous' off-road trails that offer plenty of turns, twists, rocks and roots to keep a rider guessing what to expect around the next turn. The trick is to keep one eye focused on the trail immediately in front of you while keeping your periphery vision farther down the trail.

Praying with a sense of expectancy is a lot like riding a trail. The number one job is to pursue the immediate presence of the Lord while at the same time keep the desires of your heart on the periphery. Psalm 37:4 states that when you delight in the Lord, God will give you the desires of your heart.

It means that like Gideon if you are uncertain over a call God has for you, ask for a sign. Be careful, if it's a revelation already given to you through scripture then it is unnecessary. I don't need a sign to know if I should protect my family from strife and division. I don't need a sign to know if my work and career should add value to the world or take away value. Ask for a sign, and then get back to the work the Lord has given you. Approach your day with expectancy, and God will give you the desires of your heart.

Personal Growth: Dig into a desire you have for your heart? What is keeping you from allowing it to be conceived as a God-idea? Give it to God in prayer, asking God to water it with the Holy Spirit. Ask for a sign.

Bethany Growth: Our community is growing deep and wide. Deep in commitment to be people learning to believe, belong, and bless. Pray for the growth of each person who comes through the door this week.

Day 22: Not Now

“O Lord pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God.” Daniel 9:19 ESV

Waiting for a prayer to be answered will test our faith. It tests our allegiance and love for God. Your desire for a prayer to be answered can shift your faith from the gift-giver to the gift itself. From the bless-er to the blessing. Sometimes when the answer to a prayer is ‘not yet,’ we need to let go of our timeline and still be ok with God.

In Mark Batterson’s devotion “Draw the Circle” for Day 23, he writes powerfully of the need to wait. “You name it, I don’t want to wait for it. But waiting is part of praying, and praying is a form of waiting. Prayer will sanctify our waiting, so we wait with holy expectancy. And waiting doesn’t delay God’s plans and purposes. It always expedites them. Waiting is the fast track to whatever it is that God wants to do in our lives. And we’ll discover that on God’s timeline, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”

Personal Growth: How long are you willing to wait for your prayers to be answered? What is it in us that thinks we can get more done without God’s blessing than with it? Today empty out all your dreams and desires and allow God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. Allow your day to flow from His presence.

Bethany Growth: Part of the 40 Day Challenge emerged from our need to pray for God’s blessing for our Vision. Our Vision is to multiply blessings across congregation, community, and beyond. Specifically, to be a church that launches people, groups and churches to be world-changers. To do so, we need to expand our children and youth space so that we can equip and empower every generation toward this goal. Please pray for our community this way, that we might be good stewards and fulfill the mission of our Lord.

Sunday

Day 23: Find Your Voice

The word of the Lord came to me. Jeremiah 1:4

One of the great mysteries of faith is the relationship between our will and God’s sovereign will. I can’t explain how, but nothing we do surprises God. Nothing we do can out-manuever what God plans for our life. Our decisions sometimes run counter to God’s will, but there are infinite ways that God accounts for them in His salvation plan. God is faithful to His plans, so he never gives up on the plans for you and me. Amen!

In Day 24 of Batterson’s devotion, Mark explains our call has a voiceprint. He writes, “All of us have a unique voiceprint, not just physically but spiritually as well. God wants to speak through you differently than through anyone else...But the key to discovering your prophetic voice is cultivating a prophetic ear. If you want to find your voice, you need to hear the voice of /God.

Personal Growth: Opening the Bible and reading through is an exercise of intimacy with the voice of God. When you spend time in God’s word, “you incline your ear to God, and God will incline His ear to you.”

Bethany Growth: Our council has adopted a new practice of devotion so that each meeting now opens with time with the Lord. How important it is to hear from God before we act out His will. Pray that the council makes faithful decisions as we seek God and His will for our Mission and Vision.

Day 24: A Prophetic Voice

I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets. Numbers 11:29

I almost quit seminary. By the end of my first, year I was discouraged with my academics and felt lost in my call. That summer I reluctantly accepted the required assignment of Clinical Pastoral Education in a hospital, but upon returning to school in the fall felt the same unease. Then one evening after praying another round of emotional prayers, out of nowhere I received a phone call. It was from the husband of a woman who had died over the summer at the hospital I had worked. He called me specifically to thank me for caring for her and his family. What he said next was providentially timed; he said, "You will make a fine pastor." It was a conversation I needed, it was a conversation I will never forget.

Mark Batterson rightly points out that according to 1 Corinthians 14:3, a prophet speaks words of comfort and encouragement as prompted by the Holy Spirit. It's tempting to think of a prophet as some off-the-wall religious zealot; we have painted them to be outliers. But the gift of prophetic speech shows up each time we encourage someone in the Holy Spirit.

Personal Growth: When we pray for others it helps us to see with prophetic eyes. Batterson writes that through our prayers instead of predicting the future we begin to create the future. "Prayer is the way we write the future." Pray for 3 others today who God is calling you to mentor.

Bethany Growth: Pray for the leaders of our children, youth and adult small groups. These are the prophets who are shaping the future of those being raised up in the faith.