

40 DAY
PRAYER
CHALLENGE

Day 31: The Longest Lever

"Do not despise these small beginnings." Zechariah 4:10 NLT

In the early 1940's several farming families gathered together in the upper room of a downtown salon in Elkhorn NE. They talked and prayed for a new church community to serve the growing population. Their prayers were answered when 4 years later a new mission called Bethany Lutheran purchased their first building that still stands today. I wish I could go back and meet those remnant families and tell them what God did as a result of their prayers and hard work.

Mark Batterson writes, "In Zechariah 4, the Jewish remnant who returned to Israel are getting ready to rebuild the temple. It is an overwhelming undertaking. But the Lord encourages them with these words: "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand." The plumb line was an ancient measuring tape. All they had done at this point was measure! That's it. But God was already rejoicing over them.

Personal Growth: Prayer is our plumb line. No one is greater than their prayer life. Think about that. Our potential is directly proportional to our prayer life.

Bethany Growth: Pray for our Easter guests. That Bethany will honor the prayers of their founding families by creating an environment where hearts and minds will rejoice over the resurrection news.

Day 32: Senior Partner

"Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven." Matthew 6:20

Stanley Tam is credited with the phrase that I continue to hear over and over, "You can't out give God." Stanley discovered, Batterson writes, that the key that unlocks the joy of generosity: what we keep we ultimately lose; what we give away we ultimately get back. Think about that, and then think about Abraham who Tam goes on to note; God cannot reward Abraham yet because his seed is still multiplying."

I was sharing with a new member of Bethany just last night that the idea of a reward for our generous acts sounds selfish. Most generous people I know explain quickly their motivation isn't to give for a reward. But that doesn't mean God won't reward our generosity anyway.

In Revelation, John captured the vision from God of a new heaven and new earth. This life after life-after-death will be here on a transformed heaven and earth. Which means one day when the new era begins, we will be able to see how our seeds of generosity have multiplied.

Personal Growth: what are you trying to keep that prevents you from becoming the generous person that you were created to become? What can you give in order to be released from the trap of comparison and false security? God alone is our rock!

Bethany Growth: Pray for the new opportunity to be generous as a church. Recently we have been given an opportunity to leverage our church kitchen in partnership with committed friends who are cooking for those affected by the floods. Pray that God will continue to organize our logistics so that we might serve those who are most in need.

Day 33: Prayer Contracts

“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.” Matthew 18:18

The word bind has a legal connotation. It means “to place a contract on something.” Batterson writes, “This is precisely what happens when we pray in the will of God. Our prayers place a contract in the spiritual realm.” If your prayer is in the will of God, then it is backed by the full authority of the King and His kingdom.

A.W. Tozer wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” The image we may miss is the image of Jesus sitting on the throne, and the earth is His footstool. Have we underestimated the authority that is ours because we are children of God? What is your vision of God, is it a high view or low view? Our biggest problem may be our small view of God. God is so much bigger than our biggest problems. God is so much better than our best thoughts. He is infinitely wiser and more gracious and powerful than anything we can imagine.

Personal Growth: Our prayers sometimes dry up because our view of God is too small. What prayer will you submit to the King of Kings? Live with expectancy that the King loves to answer the prayers of the ones for whom he gave His life.

Bethany Growth: Pray that our new partnership with “Boots on the Ground” will mushroom and feed so many who are hungry and without means due to the floods and beyond.

Day 34: Climb the Watchtower

I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guard post. Habakkuk 2:1

Watchtowers served a variety of purposes in ancient culture- as built-in pastures so shepherds could protect their flocks from wild animals, and as built-in vineyards for protection from thieves. The watchmen were first to see, and they saw the farthest. So it is with those who pray. Why? Because prayer provides us a vantage point unlike any other; a divine vantage point.

Personal Growth: It is part of the reason why where we pray is important. To find a place apart from distraction, where we get good reception. A place where we can focus, and where our faith is strong. It gives us the spiritual eyes to see our day.

Bethany Growth: Prayer has become like our daily bread. Each morning at 9 am staff is invited to chapel to be fed. It is an all-skate. Join us if you would like to pray for the church with us.

Sunday

Day 35: Holy Ground

“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Exodus 3:5

I remember the day like it was yesterday. Sitting in my car outside my office, I was 27 and just ended the best sales year of my young 4-year career. I should have been thrilled, but alas, I could only think of the spiritual vacuum my life had become. My work failed to match my yearning for meaning, my church home failed to match my passion for the gospel, and it was then that I asked God for direction. “God, wouldn’t it be great if there was a church that embraced the tradition and history of the Christian narrative, but was contemporary in nature.” And as I was finishing that thought, a very real, quiet and firm voice that wasn’t a voice said, “why don’t you do something about it.”

Batterson is correct, you never know when or where or how God will invade the routine of your life. It was a holy moment that was both convicting and powerfully grace-filled. I now know Bethany was the answer to that prayer. At the time, however, it took me another year to admit that my call was to ministry. God waited. I ran. And now, if I could go back to that very parking spot, I would remove my sandals. To do so was a sign of humility in the ancient culture.

Personal Growth: When we live with the spirit of expectancy, we will eventually receive more than we bargained for. For Moses, the holy ground surrounding the burning bush was not the promised land. It was right where Moses was standing. Don’t wait to worship God until you get to the Promised Land; you’ve got to worship along the way.

Bethany Growth: I think the holiest place in Bethany is a room visited the least by our members; our prayer room. Pray for our prayer ministers and those who receive prayer. May they find so much grace and power in Christ, that they take off their sandals!

Day 36: Prayer Alphabet

"Lord, teach us to pray." Luke 11:1

Batterson writes about our finicky prayer life, "Don't beat yourself up over past failures or present struggles. Simply do what the disciples did. Ask Jesus to help you, to teach you. Let their simple request become your modus operandi:" Lord, teach us to pray."

It doesn't matter how much you know. Do you have a teachable spirit? Are you hungry to learn? Are you open to change? Wisdom is knowing how much you don't know. So, start there and ask God to teach you.

Personal Growth: Pray about praying. Prayer isn't about outlining our agenda to God; it's about getting into God's presence and getting God's agenda for us. Imagine the very face of God in your mind's eye, glowing, loving, emanating glory, now receive his attention.

Bethany Growth: Pray about sharing your prayer thoughts for the 40-Day Prayer journey. We invite you to write a short reflection and share it with me via email.
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