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The Circle Maker THE SUMMARY

Chapter 1: The Legend of the Circle Maker

It was the first century BC, and a devastating drought threatened to destroy a generation – the generation before Jesus. The last of the Jewish prophets had died off nearly four centuries before. Miracles were such a distant memory that they seemed like a false memory. And God was nowhere to be heard. But there was one man, an eccentric sage who lived outside the walls of Jerusalem, who dared to pray anyway. His name was Honi. And even if the people could no longer hear God, he believed that God could still hear them.

With a six-foot staff in his hand, Honi began to turn like a math compass. His circular movement was rhythmical and methodical. Ninety degrees. One hundred eighty degrees. Two hundred seventy degrees. Three hundred sixty degrees. He never looked up as the crowd looked on. After what seemed like hours had only been seconds, Honi stood inside the circle he had drawn. Then he dropped to his knees and raised his hands to heaven. With the authority of the prophet Elijah, who called down fire from heaven, Honi called down rain.

“Lord of the universe, I swear before Your great name that I will not move from this circle until You have shown mercy upon Your children.”

The words sent a shudder down the spines of all who were within earshot that day. It wasn't just the volume of his voice; it was the authority of his tone. Not a hint of doubt. This prayer didn't originate in the vocal chords. Like water from an artesian well, the words flowed from the depth of his soul. His prayer was resolute yet humble, confident yet meek, expectant yet unassuming.

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Then it happened. As his prayer ascended to the heavens, raindrops descended to the earth.

The prayer that saved a generation was deemed one of the most significant prayers in the history of Israel. The circle he drew in the sand became a sacred symbol. And the legend of Honi the circle maker stands forever as a testament to the power of a single prayer to change the course of history.

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The timeless truth secreted within this ancient legend is as true now as it was then: Bold prayers honor God, and God honors bold prayers. God isn't offended by your biggest dreams or boldest prayers. He is offended by anything less. If your prayers aren't impossible to you, they are insulting to God. Why? Because they don't require divine intervention. But ask God to part the Red Sea or make the sun stand still or float an iron ax head, and God is moved to omnipotent action.

It is absolutely imperative at the outset that you come to terms with this simple yet life-changing truth: God is for you. If you don't believe that, then you'll pray small timid prayers; if you do believe it, then you'll pray big audacious prayers. And one way or another, your small timid prayers or big audacious prayers will change the trajectory of your life and turn you into two totally different people. Prayers are prophecies. They are the best predictors of your spiritual future. Who you become is determined by how you pray. Ultimately, the transcript of your prayers becomes the script of your life.

God has determined that certain expressions of His power will only be exercised in response to prayer. Simply put, God won't do it unless you pray for it. We have not because we ask not, or maybe I should say, we have not because we circle not. The greatest tragedy in life is the prayers that go unanswered because they go unasked.

Now here's the good news: If you do pray, all bets are off. You can live with holy anticipation because you never know how or when or where God is going to answer, but I promise you this: He will answer. And His answers are not limited by your requests. We pray out of our ignorance, but God answers out of His omniscience. We pray out of our impotence, but God answers out of His omnipotence. God has the ability to answer the prayers we should have prayed but lacked the knowledge or ability to even ask.

Chapter 3: The Jericho Miracle

A collection of stories from the Talmud and Midrash, The Book of Legends contains the teachings of Jewish rabbis passed down from generation to generation. Because it contains more than a millennium's worth of wisdom, reading The Book of Legends feels like an archaeological dig. I had dug down 202 pages when I stumbled across a story that may as well have been a buried treasure. It was the legend of Honi the circle maker. And it forever changed the way I pray.

The legend of Honi the circle maker was like a revelation of the power of prayer. It gave me a new vocabulary, a new imagery, a new methodology. It not only inspired me to pray bold prayers but also helped me pray with more perseverance. I started circling everyone and everything in prayer. I drew particular inspiration from the march around Jericho, when God delivered on a four-hundred-year-old promise by providing the first victory in the Promised Land. While the story doesn't explicitly mention the people taking up positions of prayer, I have no doubt that the Israelites were praying as they circled the city. Isn't that what you instinctively do when you face a challenge that is way beyond

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your ability? The image of the Israelites circling Jericho for seven days is a moving picture of what drawing prayer circles looks like. It's also the backdrop for this book.

Drawing prayer circles starts with identifying your Jericho. You've got to define the promises God wants to stake claim to, the miracles God wants you to believe for, and the dreams God wants you to pursue. Then you need to keep circling until God gives you what He wants and He wills. That's the goal. Now here's the problem: Most of us don't get what we want simply because we don't know what we want. We've never circled any of God's promises. We've never written down a list of life goals. We've never defined success for ourselves. And our dreams are nebulous as cumulus clouds. Instead of circles, we draw blanks.

A few years ago, I read one sentence that changed the way I pray. The author, pastor of one of the largest churches in Seoul, Korea, wrote, "God does not answer vague prayers." When I read that statement, I was immediately convicted by how vague my prayers were. Some of them were so vague that there was no way of knowing whether God had answered them or not.

The more faith you have, the more specific your prayers will be. And the more specific your prayers are, the more glory God receives. Like Honi, who prayed for a specific type of rain, nuanced prayers give God an opportunity to reveal more shades of His sovereignty. If our prayers aren't specific, however, God gets robbed of the glory that He deserves because we second-guess whether or not He actually answered them. We never know if the answers were the result of specific prayer or general coincidences that would have happened anyway.

Chapter 4: Praying Through

I've already stated our primary problem: Most of us don't get what we want because we don't know what we want. Here's our secondary problem: Most of us don't get what we want because we quit circling. We give up too easily. We give up too soon. We quit praying right before the miracle happens.

Our generation desperately needs to rediscover the difference between praying for and praying through.

Praying through is all about consistency. It's circling Jericho so many times it makes you dizzy. Like the story Jesus told about the persistent widow who drove the judge crazy with her relentless requests, praying through won't take no for an answer. Circle makers know that it's always too soon to quit praying because you never know when the wall is about to fall. You are always only one prayer away from a miracle.

Praying through is all about intensity. It's not quantitative; it's qualitative. Drawing prayer circles involves more than words; it's gut-wrenching groans and heartbreaking tears. Praying through doesn't just bend God's ear; it touches the heart of your heavenly Father.

I was rereading the story of the Jericho miracle, and I noticed something I had never seen before. During devotions one day, one phrase jumped off the page and into my spirit: *Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands."*

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Did you catch the verb tense? God speaks in the past tense, not the future tense. He doesn't say, "I will deliver." God says, "I have delivered." The significance is this: The battle was won before the battle even began. God had already given them the city. All they had to do was circle it.

As I read this story, I felt as though the Spirit of God said to my spirit, "Stop praying for it and start praising me for it." True faith doesn't just celebrate *ex post facto*, after the miracle has already happened; true faith celebrates before the miracle happens, as if the miracle has already happened, because you know that you know that God is going to deliver on His promise.

This is going to sound sacrilegious, but sometimes you need to quit praying. After you pray through, you need to praise through. You need to quit asking God to do something and start praising Him for what He had already done. Prayer and praise are both expressions faith, but praise is a higher dimension of faith. Prayer is asking God to do something, future tense; praise is believing that God has already done it, past tense.

Before you write this off as some "name it, claim it" scheme, let me remind you that God cannot be bribed or blackmailed. God doesn't do miracles to satisfy our selfish whims. God does miracles for one reason and one reason alone: to spell His glory. We just happen to be the beneficiaries.

PART ONE: THE FIRST CIRCLE – DREAM BIG

Nothing honors God more than a big dream that is way beyond our ability to accomplish. Why? Because there is no way we can take credit for it. And nothing is better for our spiritual development than a big dream because it keeps us on our knees in raw dependence on God. Drawing prayer circles around our dreams isn't just a mechanism whereby we accomplish great things for God; it's a mechanism whereby God accomplishes great things in us.

Chapter 5: Cloudy with a Chance of Quail

Drawing prayer circles often looks like an exercise in foolishness. But that's faith. Faith is the willingness to look foolish. Foolishness is a feeling that Moses was very familiar with. He had to feel foolish going before Pharaoh and demanding that he let God's people go. He felt foolish raising his staff over the Red Sea. And he most certainly felt foolish promising meat to eat for the entire nation of Israel in the middle of the wilderness. But his willingness to look foolish resulted in epic miracles – the exodus of Israel out of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and the quail miracle.

The greatest chapters in history always begin with risk, and the same is true with the chapters of your life. If you're unwilling to risk your reputation, you'll never build the boat like Noah or get out of the boat like Peter. You cannot build God's reputation if you aren't willing to risk yours. There comes a moment when you need to make the call or make the move. Circle makers are risk takers. Moses had learned this lesson well: If you don't take the risk, you forfeit the miracle.

You are only one defining decision away from a totally different life. One defining decision can change your trajectory and put you on a new path toward the Promised Land. One defining decision can totally change the forecast of your life. And it's those defining decisions that become the defining moments of our lives. The quail promise was one of those defining moments for Moses. He had a defining decision to make: to circle or not to circle.

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What do you do when the will of God doesn't add up? What do you do when a dream doesn't fit within the logical constraints of your left brain? What do you do with a promise that seems impossible? What do you do when faith seems foolish?

So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said.

Moses risked his reputation and circled the promise. He pushed all of his credibility chips to the middle of the table and told the Israelites that God was going to give them meat to eat. This had to be one of the toughest decisions he ever made, one of the scariest sermons he ever preached, one of the craziest visions he ever cast. It doesn't add up, but the will of God never does add up by human calculation. Moses had no earthly idea how God was going to keep His promise, but that isn't our business anyway. That is God's business. Too often we let *how* get in the way of *what* God wants us to do. We can't figure out how to do what God has called us to do, so we don't do it at all.

This is what I have come to call a "this is crazy" moment. If we had the transcript of Moses' thoughts, I wonder if it would read, *This is crazy, this is crazy, this is crazy.*

While it's not recorded in Scripture, I promise you that Moses prayed. Isn't that what we do when we cannot figure things out ourselves? When we find ourselves in situations that are beyond our control or beyond our comprehension, we pray. Moses must have felt like he was running off a cliff, but that is how the parachute of God's promises opens up. It often seems like circling the promises of God is risky, but it's not nearly as risky as not circling the promises of God. The greatest risk is failing to circle the promises of God because we forfeit the miracles God wants to perform.

God isn't offended by big dreams; He's offended by anything less. Your dreams may start out small, and God will honor those humble dreams, but as your faith grows so do your dreams until you dare to dream thirty, sixty, and hundredfold dreams. And when you draw those God-sized circles, it gives the Omnipresent One room to work.

Chapter 6: You Can't Never Always Sometimes Tell

One of the biggest surprises in Scripture happened on the day of Pentecost. No one could have scripted that miracle. When Peter got up that morning, he had no idea that God would pour out His Spirit like flames of fire or that the believers would spontaneously speak in languages they had never learned or that they would baptize three thousand people before the day was done. It was unpredictable and uncontrollable. Yet how appropriate that this holy surprise happens on the birthday of the church. God threw a surprise party!

A few years ago, I had a revelation while reading the description of what happened on the day of Pentecost. It says the people were "amazed and perplexed." All of us want to be amazed by God, right? It's easy to pray, "Amaze me!" But I don't know anyone who prays, "Perplex me!" But it's a package deal. If you aren't willing to be perplexed, you'll never be amazed.

Cornelius had a vision one day at three in the afternoon. The next afternoon, around noon, Peter had a perplexing vision while praying on the rooftop of Simon the tanner's house. He saw a large sheet filled with animals, reptiles, and birds,

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and the Lord said to Peter, "Kill and eat." You've got to love Peter's response: "Surely not, Lord!" Peter rebukes Jesus. But before you criticize Peter, realize that we often do the same thing when God gives us a dream that is beyond our ability to comprehend.

Peter had a hard time processing this perplexing vision. He wasn't just perplexed; Scripture says he was "very perplexed." Why? Because the vision was in direct violation of everything he had ever known. Jewish dietary laws forbade eating unclean animals. Peter says, "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." So God in His endless patience repeats the Vision three times. That must have been Peter's magic number. And the third time was the charm.

It's at this place where God wants to do something unprecedented that many of us get stuck spiritually. Instead of operating by faith, we switch back to our default setting of logic. Instead of embracing the new move of God, we fall back into the rut of our old routines.

Peter was perplexed by this vision, but he took a step of faith. He risked his reputation by breaking every law in the Jewish books and stepping foot into Cornelius's house. It was unprecedented because it was considered unclean, but that one small step proved to be a giant leap. That doorway was a wormhole. The nanosecond that Peter crossed that threshold, all Gentiles were given complete access to the gospel. If you are not Jewish, your spiritual genealogy traces back to this moment. Peter had the faith to cross the chasm because he circled a perplexing Vision in prayer. Every Gentile who comes to faith in Jesus Christ is an answer to the prayer circle that Peter drew one afternoon on the rooftop of Simon the tanner's house.

Are you willing to be perplexed? Are you open to holy surprises? Do you have the courage for God to move in unpredictable and uncontrollable ways?

If you are not open to the unprecedented, you will repeat history. If you are open to the unprecedented, you will change history. The difference is prayer.

Chapter 7: The Solutions to Ten Thousand Problems

Before the quail storm appeared on Doppler radar, God asks Moses a question. It's more than a question; it's *the* question. Your answer to this question, the question, will determine the size of your prayer circles.

"Is there a limit to my power?"

The obvious answer to that question is no. God is omnipotent, which means by definition, there is nothing God cannot do. Yet many of us pray as if our problems are bigger than God. So let me remind you of this high-octane truth that should fuel your faith: God is infinitely bigger than your biggest problem or biggest dream. And while we're on the topic, His grace is infinitely bigger than your biggest sin.

The size of prayers depends on the size of our God. And if God knows no limits, then neither should our prayers. God exists outside of the four space-time dimensions He created. We should pray that way!

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If you're like me, you tend to use bigger words for bigger requests. You pull out your best vocabulary words for your biggest prayers, as if God's answer depends on the correct combination of words. Trust me, it doesn't matter how long or how loud you pray; it comes down to your answer to the question. *Is there a limit to my power?*

With God, it's never an issue of "Can He?" It's only a question of "Will He?" And while you don't always know if He will, you know He can. And because you know He can, you can pray with holy confidence.

A big dream is simultaneously the best feeling and worst feeling in the world. It's exhilarating because it's beyond your ability; it's frightening for the same exact reason. So if you are going to dream big, you have to manage the emotional tension. Facing your fears is the beginning of the battle. Then you have to circle them over and over again.

Sometimes when you hear answers to prayer that others have experienced, it can be discouraging instead of encouraging because you wonder why God has answered their prayers but not yours. But let me remind you that these answers have rarely happened as quickly or easily as they sound. There is usually a backstory. So we are quick to celebrate the answer to prayer, but the answer probably didn't come quickly. I've never met a person who didn't experience some big disappointments on the way to his or her big dream.

Sometimes the power of prayer is the power to carry on. It doesn't always change your circumstances, but it gives you the strength to walk through them. When you pray through, the burden is taken off of your shoulders and put on the shoulders of Him who carried the cross to Calvary.

Is your dream too big for you? It better be because that will force you to pray circles around it. If you keep circling it in prayer, God will get bigger and bigger until you see your impossible prayer for what it really is: an easy answer for an almighty God.

PART TWO: THE SECOND CIRCLE – PRAY HARD

The viability of our prayers is not contingent on scrabbling the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet into the right combinations like abracadabra. God already knows the last punctuation mark before we pronounce the first syllable. The viability of our prayers has more to do with intensity than vocabulary. That is modeled by the Holy Spirit Himself, who has been intensely and unceasingly interceding for you your entire life.

Chapter 8: Persistence Quotient

God promised Joshua that He would give him every place where he set his foot, but there is a little addendum at the end of the promise: "as I promised Moses." The promise was originally given to Moses. Then it was transferred to Joshua. In much the same way, all of God's promises have been transferred to us via Jesus Christ. While these promises must be interpreted intelligently and applied accurately, there are moments when the Spirit of God will quicken your spirit to claim a promise that was originally intended for someone else. So while we have to be careful not to blindly claim promises that don't belong to us, our greatest challenge is that we don't circle the promises we could or should circle.

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By the most conservative estimates, there are more than three thousand promises in Scripture. By virtue of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross, every one of them belongs to you. Every one of them has your name on it. The question is: How many of them have you circled?

What I'm about to share has the power to revolutionize the way you pray and the way you read the Bible. We often view prayer and Scripture reading as two distinct spiritual disciplines without much overlap, but what if they were meant to be hyperlinked? What if reading became a form of praying and praying became a form of reading?

One of the primary reasons we don't pray through is because we run out of things to say. Our lack of persistence is really a lack of conversation pieces. Like an awkward conversation, we don't know what to say. Or like a conversation on its last leg, we run out of things to talk about. That's when our prayers turn into a bunch of overused and misapplied clichés. So instead of praying hard about a big dream, we're left with small talk. Our prayers are as meaningless as a conversation about the weather.

The solution? Pray through the Bible.

Prayer was never meant to be a monologue; it was meant to be a dialogue. Think of Scripture as God's part of the script; prayer is our part. Scripture is God's way of initiating a conversation; prayer is our response. The paradigm shift happens when you realize that the Bible wasn't meant to be read through; the Bible was meant to be prayed through. And if you pray through it, you'll never run out of things to talk about.

The Bible is a promise book and a prayer book. And while reading is reactive, prayer is proactive. Reading is the way you get through the Bible; prayer is the way you get the Bible through you. As you pray, the Holy Spirit will quicken certain promises to your spirit. It's very difficult to predict what and when and where and how, but over time, the promises of God will become your promises. Then you need to circle those promises, both figuratively and literally. I never read without a pen so that I can underline, asterisk, and circle. I literally circle the promises in my Bible. Then I do it figuratively by circling them in prayer.

Chapter 9: The Favor of Him Who Dwells in the Burning Bush

The longer I live the more I crave the favor of God. The greatest moments in life are moments when God intervened on our behalf and blesses us way beyond what we expect or deserve. It's a humble reminder of his sovereignty. And these favor moments become our favorite memories.

Every verse on favor is circled in my Bible, but my personal favorite is one of the blessings that Moses pronounced over Joseph:

May the LORD bless his land with the precious dew from heaven above and with the deep waters that lie below; with the best the sun brings forth and the finest the moon can yield; with the choicest gifts of the ancient mountains and the fruitfulness of the everlasting hills; with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness and the favor of him who dwelt in the burning bush.

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Did you catch “the favor” in the last phrase? God’s favor is multi-dimensional, but this may rank as my favorite kind: “the favor of him who dwelt in the burning bush.” And I love the fact that this blessing is pronounced by Moses himself. He knew whereof he spoke because he is the one who heard the Voice in the bush.

The hard thing about praying hard is letting God do the heavy lifting. You have to trust the favor of God to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. You have to trust God to change hearts, even the heart of Pharaoh.

The favor of Him who dwells in the burning bush is a unique dimension of God’s favor that enables you to stand before those who would naturally stand in opposition to you, but they supernaturally step aside or stand behind you. That is how the favor of Him who dwells in the burning bush manifested itself when Moses stood before Pharaoh. It gave a slave, on whom there was a warrant out for his arrest, the boldness to declare the promise God had given him at the burning bush: “Let my people go.”

Chapter 10: The Cattle on a Thousand Hills

One reason many people get frustrated spiritually is that they feel like it should get easier to do the will of God. I don’t know if this will be encouraging or discouraging, but the will of God doesn’t get easier. The will of God gets harder. Here’s why: the harder it gets, the harder you have to pray.

God will keep putting you in situations that stretch your faith, and as your faith stretches, so do your dreams. If you pass the test, you graduate to bigger and bigger dreams. And it won’t get easier; it’ll get harder. It won’t get less complicated; it’ll get more complicated. But complications are evidence of God’s blessing. And if it’s from God, then it’s a holy complication.

You need to come to terms with this two-sided truth: The blessings of God won’t just bless you; they will also complicate your life. Sin will complicate your life in negative ways. The blessings of God will complicate your life in positive ways.

Praying hard is hard because you can’t just pray like it depends on God; you also have to work like it depends on you. You can’t just be willing to pray about it; you also have to be willing to do something about it. And this is where many of us get stuck spiritually. We’re willing to pray right up to the point of discomfort, but no further. We’re willing to pray right up to the point of inconvenience, but no further. Praying hard is uncomfortable and inconvenient, but that is when you know you’re getting close to a miracle!

The reason God doesn’t answer our prayers isn’t that we aren’t willing to work hard enough. Praying hard is synonymous with working hard. Think of praying hard and working hard as concentric circles. It’s the way we double-circle our dreams and His promises. There comes a moment, after you have prayed through, when you have to start doing something about it. You have to take a step of faith.

Praying earnestly literally means “praying with a prayer.” It’s more than words. It means acting on your prayers because you expect an answer. Elijah didn’t just pray against the prophets of Baal; he challenged them to a sacrifice showdown.

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He didn't tell the widow of Zarephath to pray; he told her to bake a loaf of bread with her last batch of dough. And in a remake miracle, Elijah didn't pray for God to part the Jordan River; he struck it with his rolled-up cloak.

Each miracle was precipitated by a concrete step of faith: setting up a sacrifice on Mount Carmel, baking a loaf of bread, and striking the Jordan River. And God honored those steps of faith by sending fire to consume Elijah's sacrifice, multiplying that last loaf of bread so it lasted until the drought ended, and parting the Jordan River so that Elijah and Elisha walked through on dry ground.

One reason many of us never get an answer to our prayers is that all we do is pray. You can't just pray like Elijah; you have to act like Elijah. You can't just get on your knees; you also have to look toward the sea.

Let me spell it out: If you want to see crazy miracles, obey the crazy promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 11: No Answer

Some of the hardest moments in life are when you've prayed hard but the answer is no and you don't know why. And you may never know why. But that is the litmus test of trust. Do you trust that God is for you even when He doesn't give you what you asked for? Do you trust that He has reasons beyond your reason? Do you trust that His plan is better than yours?

I have a Deuteronomy 29:29 file that is filled with unanswered questions. It simply states that there are some mysteries that won't be revealed until we cross into eternity. I don't understand why God wouldn't heal my knee. I don't understand why my father-in-law passed away in the prime of life. I don't understand why loved ones have lost babies. I have a lot of unanswered questions, and many of them derive from unanswered prayers.

The hardest thing about praying hard is enduring unanswered prayers. If you don't guard your heart, unresolved anger toward God can undermine faith. Sometimes your only option is trust because it is the last card in your hand, but it's the wild card. If you can trust God when the answer is no, you're likely to give Him praise when the answer is yes. You need to press in and press on. By definition, praying hard is praying when it's hard to pray. And it's the hard times that teach us to pray hard. But if you keep praying through, the peace that transcends understanding will guard your heart and your mind.

So sometimes the answer to our prayer is no and you'll never understand why. But here is the good news: What we perceive as unanswered prayers are often the greatest answers.

Our heavenly Father is far too wise and loves us far too much to give us everything we ask for. Someday we'll thank God for the prayers He didn't answer as much or more than the ones He did. Our frustration will turn to celebration if we patiently and persistently pray through. It may not make sense for a few years. In fact, it may never make sense on this side of eternity. But I've learned a valuable lesson about unanswered prayer: Sometimes God gets in the way to show us the way.

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PART THREE: THE THIRD CIRCLE – THINK LONG

When we pray, our prayers exit our own reality of space and time. They have no time or space restrictions because the God who answers them exists outside of the space and time He created. You never know when His timeless answer will reenter the atmosphere of our lives, and that should fill us with holy anticipation. Never underestimate His ability to show up anytime, anyplace, anyhow. He has infinite answers to our finite prayers. He answers them more than once. He answers them forever. The problem, of course, is that we want immediate results. Forever is fine, but we want answers instantly.

Chapter 12: Long and Boring

Drawing prayer circles often feels like a long and boring process, and it can be frustrating when you feel like you've been circling forever. You start to wonder if God really hears, if God really cares. Sometimes His silence is deafening. We circle the cancer. We circle our children. We circle the dream. But it doesn't seem to be making a difference. What do you do? My advice: Stop, drop, and pray. Keep circling. Circle for seventy years if you have to! What else are you going to do? Where else are you going to turn? What other options do you have? Pray through.

We live in a culture that overvalues fifteen minutes of fame and undervalues lifelong faithfulness. Maybe we have it backward. Just as our greatest successes often come on the heels of our greatest failures, our greatest answers often come on the heels of our longest and most boring prayers. But if you pray long and boring prayers, your life will be anything but boring. Your life will turn into the spiritual adventure it was destined to be. It won't always get you where you want to go, but it will get you through.

Chapter 13: The Greatest of Them All

Physical posture is an important part of prayer. It's like a prayer within a prayer. Posture is to prayer as tone is to communication. If words are what you say, then posture is how you say it. There is a reason that Scripture prescribes a wide variety of postures such as kneeling, falling prostrate on one's face, the laying on of hands, and anointing someone's head with oil. Physical postures help posture our hearts and minds.

The physical posture of kneeling, coupled with a humble heart, is the most powerful position on earth. I'm not sure that the kneeling position betters my batting average in prayer, but it gets me in the right stance. All I know is this: Humility honors God, and God honors humility. Why not kneel? It certainly can't hurt.

One of my favorite prayer postures I learned from the Quakers. I lead our congregation in this prayer frequently. We begin with hands facing down, symbolizing the things we need to let go of. It involves a process of confessing our sins, rebuking our fears, and relinquishing control. Then we turn our hands over so they are facing up in a posture of receptivity. We actively receive what God wants to give – joy unspeakable, peace that transcends understanding, and unmerited grace. We receive the fruit and gifts of His Spirit with open hands and open hearts.

There is nothing magical about the laying on of hands or bowing the knee or anointing the head with oil, but there is something biblical about it. There is also something mystical about it. When we practice these prescribed postures, we are doing what has been done for thousands of years, and part of thinking long is appreciating the timeless traditions that connect us to our spiritual ancestors.

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Our minds are subconsciously primed by everything that is happening all the time. It's a testament to the fact that our minds are "fearfully and wonderfully made." It also testifies to the fact that we had better be good stewards of the things we allow into our visual and auditory cortices. Everything we see and hear is priming us in a positive or negative way. That's one reason I believe in starting the day in God's Word. It doesn't just prime our minds; it also primes our hearts. It's doesn't just prime us spiritually; it also primes us emotionally and relationally. When we read the words that the Holy Spirit inspired, it tunes us to His voice and primes us for His promptings.

One of the reasons that many people don't feel an intimacy with God is because they don't have a daily rhythm with God; they have a weekly rhythm. Would that work with your spouse or your kids? It doesn't work in God's family either. We need to establish a daily rhythm in order to have a daily relationship with God. The best way to do that is to begin the day in prayer.

The most important ten minutes of my day are the ten minutes I spend reading Scripture and praying with my kids at the beginning of the day. Nothing even comes in a close second. It sets the tone for the day. It opens the lines of communication. It gets us started on the right foot.

One of the great dangers in writing *The Circle Maker* is the application of these prayer principles without any thought. It's not a formula; it's faith. It's not a methodology; it's theology. It honestly doesn't matter whether it's a circle, an oval, or a trapezoid. Drawing prayer circles is nothing more than laying our requests before God and waiting expectantly. If walking in circles helps you pray with more consistency and intensity, then make yourself dizzy; if not, then find something, find anything, that helps you pray through.

Chapter 14: The Speed of Prayer

Almost like a sonic boom in your spirit, there comes a moment in prayer when you know that God has answered your prayer. In that moment, your frustration and confusion give way to quiet confidence. Your spirit becomes like a sea of glass because you know it's out of your hands and in the almighty hands of God. The natural resistance that was thwarting you turns into supernatural momentum that is propelling you.

At critical junctures in my life I've done a Daniel fast. It's called a Daniel fast because it's inspired by and patterned after the fasts that Daniel did at critical junctures in his life. It's different from an absolute fast because the diet generally consists of fruits, vegetables, and water. And it is typically done with a specific goal and defined timeline in mind. It was a ten-day fast that kick-started Daniel's precipitous climb to political power; it was a twenty-one-day fast that ended with an angelic encounter.

When you fast and pray in tandem, it's almost like a moving sidewalk that gets you to your desired destination in half the time. Fasting has a way of fast-tracking our prayers. Because fasting is harder than praying, fasting is a form of praying hard. In my experience, it is the shortest distance to a breakthrough.

I believe that fasting is a form of circling. In fact, an empty stomach may be the most powerful prayer posture in Scripture. Even Jesus said that some miracles are not possible via prayer. Some miracles are only accessible via prayer and fasting.

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It takes the combination of prayer and fasting to unlock some double dead bolts. When I have a big decision to make, I circle it with a fast. It doesn't just purge my body; it also purges my mind and spirit. When I need a breakthrough, I circle it with a fast. It doesn't just break down the challenges I'm facing; it also breaks down the calluses in my heart.

Maybe there is something you've been praying for that you need to start fasting for. You need to take it to the next level. You need to draw a double circle by fasting for your children or for a friend or for your business.

Chapter 15: Life Goal List

The brain is a goal-seeking organism. Setting a goal creates structural tension in your brain, which will seek to close the gap between where you are and where you want to be, who you are and who you want to become. If you don't set goals, your mind will become stagnant. Goal setting is good stewardship of your right-brain imagination. It's also great for your prayer life.

What do life goals have to do with dreaming big? For that matter, what does goal setting have to do with praying hard and thinking long? The answer is everything. Goal setting is a great way of doing all three simultaneously.

Goals are the cause and effect of praying hard. On the front end, prayer is a goal incubator. The more you pray, the more God-sized goals you'll be inspired to go after. But prayer doesn't just inspire godly goals, it also ensures that you keep praying hard because it is the only way you'll accomplish a God-sized goal. Simply put, prayers naturally turn into goals, and goals naturally turn into prayers. Goals give you a prayer target.

In their groundbreaking book *Built to Last*, Jim Collins and Jerry Porras introduced the acronym BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals). I've substituted a P for the G. I think of my God-sized goals as Big Hairy Audacious Prayers (BHAPs). They force me to work like it depends on me and pray like it depends on God.

Goals are a great way of thinking long. I have checked approximately one-quarter of my life goals off my list. Some of them, like speaking for an NFL chapel or coaching a sports teams for each of my children, I've checked off numerous times. But many of my life goals will take a lifetime to achieve. It might take until I'm seventy-five to write twenty-five books. I cannot pay for my grandchildren's college education until I have grandchildren. And I have no idea when I'll be part of baptizing three thousand people in the same place at the same time, like the day of Pentecost, but it's on my life goal list. And that's why they are life goals. They might take a lifetime to achieve, but they are worth waiting for and working for.

Finally, setting goals is a practical way of dreaming big. If prayer is the genesis of dreams, then goals are the revelation. Goals are well-defined dreams that are measurable. Getting in shape is not a goal; it's a wish. Running a half marathon, however, is a goal because you know you've accomplished it when you cross the finish line.

Goals are dreams with deadlines. And these deadlines, especially if your personality is anything like mine, are really lifelines. Without a deadline, I would never accomplish anything because I'm both a procrastinator and a perfectionist. And that's why so many dreams go unaccomplished. If you don't give your dream a deadline, it will be dead before you know it. Deadlines keep dreams alive. Deadlines bring dreams back to life.

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PART FOUR: KEEP CIRCLING

Drawing prayer circles is a lot like climbing a mountain. The dream or promise or miracle may seem impossible, but if you keep circling, anything is possible. With each prayer, there is a small change in elevation. With each prayer, you are one step closer to the answer.

Until recently, I wanted God to answer every prayer ASAP. That is no longer my agenda. I don't want easy answers or quick answers because I have a tendency to mishandle the blessings that come too easily or too quickly. I take the credit or take them for granted. So now I pray that it will take long enough and be hard enough for God to receive all of the glory. I'm not looking for the path of least resistance; I'm looking for the path of greatest glory. And that requires high-degree-of-difficulty prayers and lots of circling.

Very rarely does our first prayer request hit the bull's-eye of God's good, pleasing, and perfect will. Most prayer requests have to be refined. One of the reasons we get frustrated in prayer is our ASAP approach. When our prayers aren't answered as quickly or easily as we would like, we get tired of circling. Maybe we need to change our prayer approach from as soon as possible to as long as it takes.

Keep circling!

Chapter 16: Double Miracle

Every prayer is a time capsule. You never know when or where or how God is going to answer it, but He will answer it. There is no expiration date, and there are no exceptions. God answers prayers. Period. We don't always see it or understand it, but God always answers. We can live with holy anticipation because God is ordering our footsteps.

Chapter 17: Bottled Prayer

At some Point, our spoken words cease to exist because they are subject to the law of entropy. Our spoken words, aka sound waves, run into friction and run out of energy. Our prayers, however, are sealed forever. Our prayers never cease to exist because they aren't subject to natural laws, including the law of entropy. The supernatural laws of prayer defy the natural laws of time and space.

While it's impossible to trace the pinball path of a single prayer, our prayers somehow exit our four dimensions of space-time in order to get to the God who exists outside of the four space-time dimensions He created when He said, "Let there be light." Our prayers don't dissipate over time; our prayers accumulate through eternity.

According to the Doppler Effect, our universe is still expanding. The significance is this: The four words that God spoke at the beginning of time, "Let there be light," are still creating galaxies at the edge of the universe. If God can do that with four words, what are you worried about? There is nothing He cannot do. After all, He created everything out of nothing.

His words never return void. Neither do your prayers when you pray the word of God and the will of God. The same God who hovered over the chaos at the beginning of time is hovering over your life, and you never know when His answer will reenter the atmosphere of your life. But you can know this: The Lord is watching over His word to perform it.

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One of the most beautiful and powerful images in Scripture is found in Psalm 56:8. It's a precious promise that begs to be circled. It's the last promise I'll circle, but maybe it's a place for you to begin circling.

You have collected all my tears in your bottle.

Each and every teardrop is precious to God. They are eternal keepsakes. The day will come when He wipes away every tear in heaven. Until then, God will move heaven and earth to honor every tear that has been shed. Not a single tear is lost on God. He remembers each one. He honors each one. He collects each one.

In much the same way that God bottles our accumulated tears, God collects our prayers. Each one is precious to Him. Each one is sealed by God. And you never know when He's going to uncork an answer.

Dream big.

Pray hard.

Think long.

The Pastor's Perspective

I've read a lot of books on prayer over the years, but few have both encouraged and challenged me the way Mark Batterson's *The Circle Maker* has. While not a book on leadership, this is a book that every leader should read.

Obviously a book written by a practitioner, not a theorist, *The Circle Maker* is filled with insights that come from practice, as well as from pastoring people who are dealing with the real stuff of life as they are learning to pray. I've seen so many of these played out in the people I pastor! Here are just a few of the ones that struck me:

The importance of praying specifically: Often our prayers are so general, and so vague, that we have no idea if God has answered them or not. And, "*we never know if the answers were the result of specific prayer or general coincidences that would have happened anyway*"—so God doesn't really receive the glory. And honestly, our faith that prayer makes a difference is actually undermined.

The importance of taking risks, and being willing to look foolish: *You cannot build God's reputation if you aren't willing to risk yours.* This is one of those truths I hate—I really don't want to risk my reputation! But I have seen that that is the only way to position yourself for a miracle of any kind.

The blessings of God won't just bless you; they will also complicate your life. Sin will complicate your life in negative ways. The blessings of God will complicate your life in positive ways. This is certainly true to my experience, but I think most of us aren't clear on that. We somehow think God's blessings should make our life easier—that it means everything will work out with no effort or stress on our part. And because we don't understand that, we often miss out on giving thanks or even really embracing what God is doing. It's a pernicious lie that the evidence of God's favor is a stress-free, simple life.

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One of the things that shows that this is written by a practitioner is the way unanswered prayers are addressed. *“The hardest thing about praying hard is enduring unanswered prayers. If you don’t guard your heart, unresolved anger toward God can undermine faith.”* I think every pastor has had to deal with people whose faith has been undermined because God didn’t answer their prayer, or answer it in the way they wanted. And then they became angry, or hurt, or cynical, and often turned away from God. It’s sad, but not uncommon.

As pastors we have to be able to deal with that—to give an answer, or a perspective, that makes sense and can help people over the hump.

I’m challenged to pray bigger prayers, and persist in them. What was your reaction to *The Circle Maker*? [Click here](#) and share your thoughts—I’d love to hear them.