

“When the Church Prays” The Mountain Mover
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INTRODUCTION: Wouldn't it be great if we had some button we could push that would make everything alright? Have you seen this little thing from Staples? It's called the Easy Button. You push it and it says, "That was easy". Wouldn't it be great if life was really like that?

In my yard, I have the hardest ground known to man, and trying to grow grass is almost impossible. We look at the backyard and it's like concrete. It would be so good to just look at it, push a button, and instantly have a manicured, lush, green lawn.

Or like Friday night when I drove with my band to Virginia Beach to lead worship for a lock-in for teenagers: We drove 3 hours there and 3 hours back. It would have been awesome to just push a button and be there instantly.

What about maybe some more serious problems? What if I could push a button and always make the right decision? What if you could push a button like this and make a relationship better when there's been a conflict. Or, you could push the button, and instantly erase all your debt and pay all your bills and your child's college tuition. The cancer patient could push the button and all the chemotherapy would be over, and the hair would come back, and the disease would be gone.

Are you dealing with anything right now that you wish you could push a button and magically have all your troubles wiped away?

But that is not how life works, and it is not how God works in us. In fact, God sometimes allows us to be in a crisis for a reason.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Cor. 4:16-18, NIV

So there's no Easy Button for life's problems. And Scripture tells us to look to God to be our help. When we face life's obstacles, and troubles, and tragedies, we need to take them to God.

May 1st was our National Day of Prayer. Now, we don't believe we should focus just one day on prayer. It's supposed to be a daily part of your life. And because it's so vital to the life of the church, this whole month we want to talk about prayer and the effects of prayer. I know that we all face different crises in life.

In the scriptures, we learn that the early Christians faced some crises. Acts 4, Page 772.

Background: Acts 4:18 Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

21 After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

Peter and John are commanded by the Sanhedrin to quit speaking or teaching in the name of Jesus. But they refused to be deterred. They went back to their brothers and sisters and told them what had occurred.

23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

" 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.

27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

These Christians were facing a serious CRISIS!

They were threatened that if they continued to preach in Jesus' name, they would suffer the consequences. These threats could tempt many Christians to hide their faith in fear. The goal of the threats was to stop the preaching of the gospel – to prevent Christianity from spreading – to silence the voice of Christ in the world.

These Christians understood that this was not just about them. Peter and John had just gotten back from the trenches. This was not just a threat to their welfare but to the existence of the church and reaching the souls of men. This was an effort by Satan himself to stamp out the church and prevent them from accomplishing the mission Jesus had given them. More was at stake than met the eye.

Warren Wiersbe writes: "Too often today, Believers gather for prayer as though attending a concert or a party. There is little sense of urgency and danger because most of us are comfortable in our Christian walk. If more of God's people were witnessing for Christ in daily life, there would be more urgency and blessing when the church meets for prayer."

The early church had a crisis on it's hands.

We have crises in our lives.

We have Personal crises...health issues; financial stresses; job related problems; relationship tensions...We need to take all of these before the Father. He cares about those situations and He wants to help us get through them.

We have Spiritual crises...threats against the church or preachers. I especially notice these when I read stories from our missionaries abroad in India, Indonesia, and China. Apathy. Apathy is a spiritual crisis,

because it's the "I don't care" kind of attitude that leads to spiritual illness. Apathy leads Christians to only consider themselves. It's a selfish spirit that would cause one to stop speaking about Jesus because of fear; and that same spiritual sickness can lead Christians to say, "let the world go to hell as long as I am saved".

And we have other Spiritual crises. When our faith is tested by something we don't understand. Or when we're tempted to sin. We need to take our spiritual crises to the Lord in prayer.

Look back at Acts 4. Notice, these men were in a crisis that God put them in. He moved them to preach the gospel, and God knew they were going to face hard times because of it. Sometimes, the crises we face are there because God wants us to walk through them. I can't tell you why, only that He has a reason.

But look at what they prayed for: They Prayed for COURAGE! "to speak your word with great boldness" – Rather than asking that God take their problem away, they prayed that God would give them the courage to face their problems.

Listen again to Warren Wiersby:

In His word, God speaks to us and tells us what He wants to do. In prayer, we speak to Him and make ourselves available to accomplish His will. True prayer is not telling God what to do, but asking God to do His will in us and through us. It means getting God's will done on earth, not man's will done in heaven.

[The disciples in Acts 4] did not pray to have their circumstances changes or their enemies put out of office. Rather, they asked God to empower them to make the best use of their circumstances and to accomplish what He had already determined."

Phillips Brooks writes, "Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men and women. Do not pray for tasks to be equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks."

Jesus taught his disciples how to pray. And he taught them about how to handle the obstacles and crises in their lives. Once when a man brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples, they could not heal him. So they brought the boy to Jesus, who did heal him. The Bible says, "Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, 'Why couldn't we drive it out?'" 20He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17: 19-20

Nor, for years I have thought that passage is kinda harsh. I mean, how little must my faith be? I have never prayed and moved even a single rock, much less a whole mountain. So what exactly is Jesus talking about here?

Well, the Bible teaches us that we can be confident that our prayers will be answered, but only if we pray with a believing heart. Our prayers have to be more than merely wishes or hopes, or feeble aspirations. We need to speak to God with believing, faith-filled hearts. It's about our faith.

Now, get this: How do you pray a prayer so filled with faith that it can move a mountain? By shifting the focus from the size of your mountain to the sufficiency of the mountain-mover, and by stepping forward in obedience.

When you pray, what's your focus? Do you spend time describing your problem to God, and how difficult it is, and how miserable you are, and how hard it is for you to find a solution? Haven't we all prayed like that?

Instead, when we face crises in our lives, we should shift the focus of our prayer. Don't spend a lot of time describing your mountain to the Lord. He knows what it is. Instead, focus your attention on the mountain-mover – the God of the universe. Focus on His power, His size, His glory, and His faithfulness. Then walk in faith, where God leads you.

Look again at the disciples' prayer:

In their prayer they:

Acknowledged God as the creator of the heavens and the earth. (v24)

They recalled scripture that was relevant to their situation. (vv25-26)

The spoke of the crisis they were facing. (vv27-29)

They asked for courage to proclaim God's word with courage. (v29)

They requested that God reveal Himself through miraculous signs. (v30)

One commentator wrote: "They did not ask for protection; They asked for power. They did not ask for fire from heaven to destroy the enemy, but for power from heaven to preach the Word and heal the sick. Their great desire was for boldness in the face of opposition. The emphasis is on the hand of god at work in the life of the church, not the hand of man at work for God. Believing prayer releases God's power and enables God's hand to move.

Are there problems in your life that tempt you to concentrate on them rather than your Lord? An illness, a troubled marriage, your relationship with your kids, financial struggles, depression? Whatever it is that takes all your attention, what would it mean for you to pray focused on the Lord rather than your crisis? Instead of counting the ways you're affected by your problem, you could remember all the times when God has been faithful to you. Instead of praying for your crisis to go away, you could pray that God would make you stronger to handle the crisis.

Look with me what happened when the disciples prayed like that. After the disciples prayed, the Bible says the place was Shaken! God confirmed their faith by shaking the place where they met.

That wasn't the only time God had ever done something like that. Later, in Acts 16 the bible says, "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose." (Acts 16:25-26, NIV)

God manifested Himself in some way which established that He had heard their prayer and He was with them.

And His Spirit moved in them. The Holy Spirit was already in them, but the Spirit moved in them in a special way. They sensed His presence more acutely, and they felt His power more intensely.

Many of us have experienced that from time to time. It's hard to explain, but there are times in worship where I've felt and sensed God's presence more. Maybe you have, too. Our hair stands on end and we physically, emotionally and spiritually sense that God is among us. God is always with us, but there are times we need to experience that more than usual because of some crisis or challenge we face.

God continued to answer their prayer. He gave them the courage to stand boldly and preach His Word. It would not be long before the Jewish leaders tired of the apostles' preaching and they had them thrown in prison again. (Acts 5:17-42) This time God's angel opened the prison doors and the apostles went right back out into the temple courts and in broad daylight, for all to see, began to preach in the name of Jesus again. They were brought back before the Jewish leaders who confronted them.

28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. Acts 5:28-30, NIV

The apostles were flogged and sent on their way with strict orders not to preach in Jesus' name, but the apostles went back out every day in the temple courts and from house to house teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. And the church grew as every day people were coming to faith in Christ. Even some of the priests began to believe in Jesus. These apostles' turned the whole world upside down. The whole earth was shaken and continues to shake because of what God did through these people.

My friends, our world needs to be shaken up. People need to be shaken up. Families need to be shaken up. The Church needs to be shaken up.

What I mean is that sometimes we can become complacent. Sometimes we can get into our own little worlds and we can have the attitude that everything is ok with me so why should I make any ripples. I'll just keep my faith to myself and let the world do its thing. Live and let live. Why cause trouble for myself.

There is a problem with that kind of philosophy: we have a mission to accomplish. Once we came to Christ, we were compelled to think of other people and to love them.

God is calling our church to do the same thing he called the apostles to do – proclaim Christ until we die. That is what each of us must be doing. Proclaiming Jesus through the way we live, the way we spend our money, the way we act towards others and the things we say.

We honor Christ in the life we live, and in the way we deal with the end of life. So no matter what happens, no matter what the crisis, we need to boldly proclaim the word of God in Jesus' name.

The key is to remember what those early disciples remembered.

God IS the CREATOR of the universe. There is nothing He cannot do. He is all powerful and all knowing. We need to let God's word pour into our minds. They knew the word and they were able to recall specific things to help them in specific situations.

This month, our series is called "When the church prays" and I mean that to be a challenge. What would happen to our church if we began to pray like this? With faith in the mountain-mover. How might we be strengthened if we focused not on how big our problems are, but on how big our God is? What obstacles are facing our church?

Our church is in a community of tens of thousands of people. Many of those people do not have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. God has put this church in this place with a mission to reach people for

Christ. There will be obstacles. We may need to overcome the obstacle of apathy. We may need to overcome obstacles of finances or other limitations. We may have to overcome being relatively unknown in our community. Not to mention our own fears and inhibitions.

Friends, I just want to find out what happens when our church will pray. And when we cry out to the mountain-mover, He can use us to do His will.

WHEN THE CHURCH PRAYS...when we pray together...when we trust God together...when we go into the storm together...when we face hardships together...when we suffer loss together...we come to realize that GOD IS ABLE!

I want to be a part of a church that allows God to shake us when we need to be shaken. I want to be a part of a church that allows God to move us into those difficult territory. We don't need to run from problems, we just need to pray that God gives us the courage to be faithful as we face them. And it might get worse before it gets better. It did for the early church. Persecution would break out, Christians would be killed and punished for their faith, but they kept the faith.

Let us be a church...let us be people who will be courageous in the face of the enemy. Let us be faithful even when dealing with the most severe trials, even trials that lead to death. We serve a God who is ABLE to SHAKE THE EARTH.

Don't you want to put your trust in God? What are you dealing with right now? What crisis are you in the midst of? What is it that makes you want to run and hide in fear? Listen...GOD IS ABLE. LET'S PRAY TOGETHER....

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