

Pray Big and Pray Bold

by Sundar Krishnan

We need to pray big and bold, bringing the sovereign God, creator God, and God of Revelation into our prayers, and praying according to God's word and will.

Duration: 24:59

Scripture: Psalm 2:1-2, Acts 4:31, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 4:2, James 5:16

Topics: "Intercessory Prayer", "Spiritual Boldness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the power of intercessory prayer in shaping the future and creating a better world. It explores the concept of spiritual defiance through prayer, believing in God's promises, and surveying the future with faith. The sermon delves into Acts chapter 4, highlighting the prayer of the early church in the face of opposition, showcasing the attributes of God and the importance of boldness in prayer.

Transcript

I have just one question. How come I'm the only speaker that has to follow Greg? But as you will learn from your manuscript studies tomorrow, a man can only receive what is given to him from heaven. This is what's been given.

So here I am. A man I had never heard before, writing in a magazine that I've never read, wrote something that I have never forgotten. Walter Wink, writing in Sojourner's magazine, wrote this.

Follow me as I read it for you. Intercessors have an essential role to play in creating a better future for our world. Because intercession is spiritual defiance of what is in the name of what God has promised.

The shape of the future will be determined by those who can survey all its various possibilities and who by faith latch on to one as inevitable. History belongs to the intercessors who thus believe the future into being. Now, I'm sure every one of us would want to have an essential role to play in creating a better future and you've been hearing about that so far in this conference.

But how many of us have really believed that intercession is foundational to that? And even more to the point, how often do we conceive of prayer as spiritual defiance of what is in the name of what God has promised? Not too many. In fact, most people don't pray that way. Let me just give you an illustration.

Imagine with me this following scenario. You've graduated from university and it's about eight months. Let's all call your name John.

And you've had three interviews in those eight months and you haven't found a job yet. Your in-laws for your marriage offer to help you, but you're embarrassed about that. Tomorrow you have a really promising interview.

And so you go to your prayer group on a Thursday night and say, can you please pray for me? Here's what a typical prayer might look like. Lord God, you know that John is so disappointed. He's had three interviews and he hasn't had any job offers yet.

And Lord, you know that he's discouraged. Lord, you know that it's been eight months. Lord, you know that he's embarrassed to take money from his in-laws.

And Lord, you know, he has an important interview tomorrow. Please give him the job. Amen.

Now it's a bit of an exaggeration, but how much of an exaggeration is it? So much of our praying is simply repeating back to God what he already knows as if he needs us to tell him. So here's the question. How do we turn cliché written prayers that simply repeat back to God what he already knows into spiritual defiance of what is in the name of what God has promised? How do we pray in such a way that we survey the future and of all possible futures latch on to one as absolutely inevitable and pray that into being? And for guidance, we're going to go to an ancient prayer, Acts chapter four, the first detailed recorded prayer of the of the truly missional church, the New Testament church in Acts chapter four.

Let me set the scene for you. Peter and John have healed a man who was lame. That brought forth a huge crowd.

They preached the gospel of Jesus and forgiveness of sin in his name. Many people respond. The news gets to the Sanhedrin, who are the highest ruling body in Israel at that time.

And Peter and John are called to the task and they are rebuked and threatened with severe persecution unless they stop preaching in the name of Jesus. They bring the news back to the early church and the church begins to pray. And here's the first thing that they pray.

Oh, sovereign Lord, creator of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them. Before they ask God for anything, they set their praying in the context of two attributes of God, his sovereignty and the fact that he's created. Let's look at both of them for a minute.

First of all, why sovereign? Listen, prayer only makes sense if God is absolutely sovereign. What is the point asking God to intervene in situations if he is not absolutely in control of all human and non-human, animate and inanimate factors that have a bearing upon that situation? Only a sovereign God makes prayer sensible. Not only that, it reminds them of the fact that God is sovereign even over this unexpected obstacle that has come to them in the opposition of the Sanhedrin.

It is he who is still in charge, not them. And then they talk about the sovereign Lord who created the heavens and the earth. Why creation at the beginning of prayer? Blaise Pascal, the French Christian thinker, said prayer is God's way of conferring upon human beings the dignity of causality.

In other words, God has given to us the incredible privilege of partnering with him in his creative activities through our prayers. In other words, when we pray, things happen. Very early on at the beginning of my ministry at Rexdale, I happened to be thumbing through a leadership magazine and came across a cartoon that I've never forgotten.

It was a picture of a pastor who was kneeling in his study in prayer and his secretary has opened the door and she looks in and says, oh, good, you're not busy. You will not get that from the Bible anywhere. Do this exercise sometime.

Trace in the New Testament letters every prayer request that the Apostle Paul makes to unnamed churches and unnamed individuals all over Asia Minor. And you will discover that he has tied the success of every aspect of the missionary program of the church to the intercession of unnamed men and women. And if that was true for Paul, why do you think it would be different for you and for me? It was so refreshing to have Denise Margaret stop in the middle of a message and pray.

It was an acted out message that I am preaching to you today. And so they set their prayer in these two attributes of God, the sovereignty of God and the fact that God is created. Then they continue, you spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant saying, why would the nation so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth prepared for battle, the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.

The God of sovereignty, the God of creation, and now they bring the God of revelation to the picture, the God who spoke. These opening verses of their prayer are actually taken from the first two verses of Psalm two. Why would they be interested in that song written so long ago? It referred to a time in the life of King David, who was king of Israel in Jerusalem, when he was under tremendous attack.

And if you look at those verses, you will find that the opposition was formidable. They were numerous and powerful. They were angry and determined.

They were strategic and united. Six adjectives to describe formidable opposition. It reminded them of their own situation, but that's exactly what the Sanhedrin was like.

And yet the key, the key sentence as to why they went and gravitated to this verse was verse two. Why did the nations waste their time with futile plans? Precisely because David was the God's anointed king, even the most formidable opposition against him was guaranteed to fail. It was futile.

That's right. No wonder they remembered those two verses, because in their predicament, with a powerful Sanhedrin arrayed against them, threatening to persecute them if they wouldn't stop, stop preaching in Jesus name. These verses reminded them of the fact that the most formidable opposition against God's servants is futile and will not accomplish its purposes.

Well, now you would think they are ready to ask God for something. Not yet, not yet. They continue in verse twenty seven.

In fact, this has happened here in this very city for Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate, the governor, the Gentiles and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your holy servant, whom you anointed. But everything they did was determined beforehand, according to your will. What God spoke a thousand years ago through the mouth of King David, he has recently confirmed in history in the events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, the true son of David, also faced formidable opposition. They, too, were numerous and powerful, angry and determined, strategic and angry. And yet what happened? It says here everything they did was determined beforehand, according to your will.

The most sustained opposition against Jesus was that which God had already forwarded. Now, can you see what's happening right now in this prayer meeting? And they haven't yet prayed about the situation. They began with a radar screen, if you will, that was full of the Sanhedrin, the opposition.

And slowly, like four linemen breaking through an offensive line and squishing a quarterback before he can complete the pass, God comes into the radar screen from the left hand corner, a sovereign God who makes prayer meaningful from the right hand corner, the creator God who tells us that when we pray, things happen from the left hand bottom corner, a God who speaks and says that all opposition against my anointed is in vain. And from the bottom right hand corner, a God who is still acting the same way, the quarterback is crushed. And all they see on the screen now is the God to whom they are praying.

And once God has been exalted to his proper position, all opposition takes its appropriate position, which is a tiny little bit on the radar screen. And now they're ready to pray. Now, at this time, I don't know about you, but if I were them, I would want to pray for safety, right? And some degree of protection.

I've just been threatened with persecution if I continue praying, preaching, but that's not what they pray. Look what they say in verse twenty nine. And now, Lord, now finally, now that we've got you center stage, sovereign creator, revealer, actor in history.

And now, Lord, hear their threats and give us your servants great boldness in preaching your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power. May miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant, Jesus.

Why did they pray this way? As I told you, Psalm two was already in their minds. They've already taken the first two verses of that Psalm to remind themselves that opposition against them is futile. In the rest of the Psalm, if you will read it, you will find that David, after affirming the futility of his opposition's plans, affirms the fact that he has been enthroned king in Jerusalem.

And you know what he does? David preaches to them because Psalm two ends by saying, therefore, your kings be warned. Kiss the sun, meaning David, lest he be angry for his anger can flare up in a moment. It was a bold invitation to the enemies of David to recognize God's sovereignty over David's life and submit to him while they still had a time.

So taking their cues, the apostles knew what they had to do. Jesus was the true son of David. Jesus and his resurrection had been exalted with these very words from Psalm two.

And therefore, they knew what David did. They knew they had to continue preaching. And therefore, they pray for boldness and for courage.

And for God to confirm the preaching with signs, wonders, and miracles. And boy, did God ever answer for the prayer ends with these words. After this prayer, the meeting place shook and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Then they preached the word of God with boldness. That was 33 AD. How about 2009 AD? How does this prayer help us? And I want to give you two examples before I wrap it up with one key observation.

One far away from here and one much closer to home. We'll come back to John, unemployed John, in a few moments. But several years ago, maybe almost 20 years ago, when I was reading a denominational magazine, they had an article in there about 17 Vietnamese pastors that had been in prison.

And the lead story was about one particular pastor named his name was Pastor Ha. And God put it upon my heart that day to start praying for this man. Now, how do you pray for somebody who's in prison? Well, I guess we know how not to pray.

Lord, you know, Mr. Ha is in prison. Please get him out of there quick. What can I learn from Acts chapter four? And here's the journey that God took me on and then continued to go on for nearly 20 years now.

First of all, I had to bring the sovereign God into the picture. I had to remind myself that it was not the Viet Cong at that time, but God was still sovereign and that Pastor Ha was not in jail because they determined it, but because God determined it. I prayed that Pastor Ha in that prison might have that robust conviction of the sovereignty of God.

Then it was time to bring the creator God into the picture. I had to remind myself that even though I was 8,000 to 9,000 miles away when I prayed for him, things would happen. Why? Because God had conferred upon you and me the dignity of causality as we pray.

But the most important part of it, I had to find my equivalent of Psalm 2. So I asked myself, Lord, what have you shown in your word about people, your people that you have allowed to be in prison? Help me through that to pray according to your word. Well, I don't have time to go through all of that, but let me give you a couple of examples. I thought first of Joseph.

What was Joe? What happened to Joseph when he was in prison? The Bible tells us that God was with Joseph to such an extent that everything Joseph did was so powerful, executed so flawlessly that he had favor in the eyes of his jailers and they promoted him. Then I learned from the story of Joseph that Pharaoh's two key servants, the butler and the bearer, came into that jail and as a result of that, Joseph was able to interpret certain dreams they had, which, of course, eventually led to his release at the right time. So I took those two things and began to pray this way for Pastor.

I said, Lord, give him such success in all the work that he does, no matter how menial it is in the jail, that he will come to the attention of his guards and they will put him in charge over other. And then I prayed, Lord, send people who have influential connections into those jails. Create needs within their hearts that Pastor Ha can become aware of and then give Pastor Ha the wisdom to help them in those dreams, to interpret the dreams and counsel them so that they can put in a good word for him at the right time.

Then I began to think of the Apostle Paul, who spent a lot of time in jail. I look at all the things Paul did in jail. First of all, he sang songs so powerfully that jail cells ripped open and jailers became Christians.

Secondly, he prayed for his congregation. Thirdly, God gave him such insight into scripture that from jail he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Where would we be without those four letters? And then God provided an opportunity for some of his friends to come and help him and take care of his physical needs.

And not only that, in jail, he carried on an ongoing ministry of mentoring and discipling. And so now I had five more things that I could pray for Pastor Ha. I said, Lord, if he's ever beaten and he's ever tortured, enable him to sing jailhouse songs in the middle of the night and rip open the jail cells and let jailers come

to know Jesus.

I then prayed that God would give him such wisdom and insight from the word of God that when he was released and went back to his church, he would be a far more powerful preacher than he had ever been before. I prayed that God would give favor to his jailers to allow his friends to come and minister to him and that he would have a ministry of discipling and mentoring. Now, all of that just came from two imprisoned people in the word of God, I will leave it to your imagination, your exercise to add the examples of Daniel and Peter, and you can continue to pray for Pastor Ha.

Now, we also learned from Acts chapter two, there was not only the word of God, but the work of God that also helps us in this exercise. How did that help me? Several years ago, reading Charles Colson's book, *The Body*, I came across the story of a young Russian girl who grew up in the school system and was brainwashed, but eventually she came to know Jesus as a savior and she became a poet, and so she was among the first to be interred and she would be interrogated by the KGB. Apparently, in order to keep her sanity during those times, she learned to compose poetry in her head while she was being interrogated.

And then as soon as she went back to herself, she would write out these poems, poetries. Now, I would never have learned that you could pray that way for an imprisoned person from the word of God, but I read it from the work of God. And so I began to pray for Pastor Ha one more thing.

This is where the creator God comes into the picture. And I said, Lord, unleash all of your creative powers in Pastor Ha. I don't know whether the man is a poet or not, but unleash all those creativities within him so that he will be able to resist every kind of brainwashing that they submit to him.

You get the idea, right? Now, that's Pastor Ha far away from here. How about closer to home? Let's come back to John, poor, unemployed John. How might we pray for John in the light of what we've learned from Acts chapter two? We know how not to pray.

It might mean praying this way for him. It might mean asking the sovereign God to build such a robust sense of his sovereignty to John that John would realize that it is God who controls the U.S. economy or the Canadian economy or the world economy. Wall Street certainly didn't take him by surprise.

We can then pray that the sovereign Lord who knows where he is can influence the minds and the hearts of CEOs and board of directors of companies, that they can make decisions that will create job opportunities that are perfectly suited for John. Those are two examples of God's sovereignty at work. Now, you say, can we pray like that? Of course, this is all about praying big and praying bold.

Not, please look after him. And then how about the creator God? Here are some things that came to mind. We could pray that during this unexpected time that John has in his hands, that God would unleash his creativity and teach John to use his time in unexpectedly creative ways.

To such an extent, perhaps that God would open up whole new avenues for John that he might never have even thought of. Read the story of Stephen Jobs sometimes and how being fired from Apple lent to some of his present spectacular successes, especially through his creativity. If God can do that through common grace, what can he not do through special electing grace? And then what if we would ask God to let John's creative powers also help him write resumes, make contacts in whole new ways? But how about the God of Revelation? What if we start praying that during this time of difficulty, John will fall in love with the word of God in ways that he has never been before? That God will give him fresh insights into

scripture.

As a result of that, that John will become a spiritual leader in his home because he's now a man who's filled with a God who is sovereign, a God who is a creator and filled with God's word and truth. Maybe we can pray that God will give him a special sense of compassion during this time with others who have no jobs at all. The poor surrounding him so that when he does get a job, he can be a man who will be generous and kind and maybe get involved in the ministry to the underprivileged.

And then we can pray that John will be so convinced of God's sovereignty that when he goes for that interview the next day, he will not feel any need to position himself. He will not feel any need to betray his integrity, but in confidence in a sovereign God, he will be true to himself and see what happens. Now, can you imagine anything more distant than, Lord, you know he's unemployed and please give him a job? Now, all this raises one important question.

If we pray this way, are we guaranteed results? After all, something dramatic happened there. The place where they were praying was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they preached the word of God with boldness. So, are we guaranteed that Pastor Ha will get out from jail? Are we guaranteed that one of these things will happen to John? One of the most important lessons I've learned in 30 years on the life of prayer is that prayer, surprising though it may seem to you, is not about getting answers.

Prayer is fundamentally not about getting answers. Think with me for a minute. What would happen if every situation in your life, no matter what thing you prayed for, whether something close by or something far away, whether it was a need for a job or an imprisoned pastor and every situation in between, what if in every situation that you prayed for, you took time pouring over the word of God to first of all ask yourself, what does it mean to bring a sovereign God into this situation? What does it mean to bring the creator God into this situation? What does it mean to bring the revealer God into this situation? What does it mean to bring the God who is active in history into this situation? And you keep up that for weeks and months and years, you know what's going to happen? Circumstances outside of you might never change, but you will be unrecognizably transformed.

So what do you think God's real agenda is? Anybody who can save the Apostle Paul all by himself in the way he did certainly doesn't need a new you and me. But like in every other thing in the Christian life, just like all ministry is a gift of God for us, it's not our gift to him, it's his gift to us. So this whole life of prayer and intercession along the lines that I've talked about today, it's not our gift to God, it is God's gift to us.

Think with me for a minute. What kind of people would you be in your college campuses? What kind of people would you and I be in our places of work? Be they inside the home or outside the home? Whether they are international workers 15,000 miles across from here or workers next door in a local church like I am. What kind of people would we be if day in, day out, month in, month in, year in, year out, we are filling our radar screens in all these situations with a God who is sovereign, who is creator, who is redeemer, and who is working? Would we not be different people in these places than we might be today? Now, I was sharing some of these truths this past August in a church in California where I was on sabbatical.

And I got to this point in the message where I was sharing these truths that prayer is not ultimately about getting answers. And so I talked to them, I said, I've been praying for Pastor Ha for 15, 17 years, and I don't know whether he's been released or not. Anyway, I finished the message, and on the Saturday night, five young people came to the front.

They all happened to be Cambodian. And they introduced themselves to me, and they said, hey, we want to let you know that Pastor Ha has been released. He is actually ministering in a church in Seattle.

And we heard him recently. But wait, the best is yet to come. And he went on to say that as we heard his testimony, many of the things that you taught us we can pray about were things that were happening in the jail cell.

And specifically the issue of creativity. Remember I said that one of the things I had been praying for, that God had led me to pray for, was that God's creative abilities would be unleashed in this man? Well, you know what Pastor Ha did in that jail? He found that the air ducts were large enough that if he lay down flat on the floor, he could actually preach the gospel through these air ducts. And prisoners all over the jail cells heard the gospel.

What evangelism technique teaches you that? But a creator God can do it, right? So listen folks, pray big, pray bold. History belongs to the intercessors.

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