



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Praying Boldly

Guest(s): Mark Batterson

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Dr. James Dobson: Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson, and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

Roger Marsh: In Matthew chapter seven, verse seven and eight, we see these words from Jesus written down, "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." Now, we know that the Bible is the infallible word of God, but what exactly do those verses really mean? Can we just ask for anything and God will give it to us?

Well, I'm Roger Marsh. And our guest today here on Family Talk may be able to add some clarity and encouragement to the discussion. His name is Mark Batterson, and he is the lead pastor of National Community Church in Washington, DC. He's also the best-selling author of *The Circle Maker*, *Chase the Lion*, and several other faith centric books. Mark Batterson delivered a message at the 2018 National Day of Prayer in Washington, DC. And that is what we'd like to share with you today. It's on the topic of praying boldly. Here now is Mark Batterson on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Mark Batterson: Well, what a joy to welcome you to DC. It is such a joy to host this event. I've got to say that some of my heroes in ministry and in prayer are in this very room. And if I start to naming names, we're going to get in trouble, but you know who you are. And so thank you for being here. Can I tell you just a fun little story? And then if you have a Bible, you can turn over to Acts chapter 10. We'll get there in just a moment. Few years ago, I wrote this book called *The Circle Maker*, and in it is a story about a wise sage by the name of Honi. In the first century BC, there was a drought in Israel that threatened to destroy a generation, the generation before Jesus. And so the people asked if Honi would come pray. And he did something curious.

He took his staff and he put it on the ground, and he began to turn. And he turned all the way around until he was standing in the circle that he had drawn. And then he knelt in that circle and he prayed this prayer. He said, "Sovereign Lord, I swear before your great name that I will not leave this circle until you

have mercy upon your children." That's a bold prayer, but I believe that God honors bold prayers because bold prayers honor God. Something amazing happened. It began to rain. But while the people rejoice, Honi was still kneeling in the circle, and said, "Not for such rain of I prayed, but for rain that will fill pits and caverns and cisterns." According to the historical...it began to rain so hard that there were flash floods and the people had to go up to the temple mount.

Honi was still kneeling in his circle, said, "Not for such rain of I prayed, but for the rain of your blessing." In favor, in graciousness, it began to rain in perfect moderation. Now, something interesting happened. The Sanhedrin, they thought that perhaps Honi shouldn't have been praying that way, that maybe it was a little too bold, but it's hard to argue with an answered prayer. And so ultimately... Are you ready for this? He was honored for the prayer that saved a generation. I want to make sure I'm in the right room today. Do you believe in the prayer that can save a generation?

And so let me give a little bit of context to where we are. And let me say this upfront, we need to pray in the will of God and for the glory of God. This is not about God giving us what we want. I don't believe prayer is about outlining our agenda to God. It's about getting at God's presence and letting God outline His agenda to us. And then we begin to pray in the will of God and for the glory of God. And then we begin to experience the favor of God, and God begins to do some amazing things. I have to say that after I wrote *The Circle Maker*, some people took it a little literally and asked if they had to actually pray in a circle. And the answer is no. It can be a trapezoid, a square, any geometry you want.

In fact, it doesn't have to be a physical circle. If you said, "Mark, what do you circle more than anything else?" Well, it's my three kids. And I circle Luke 2:52, "May you grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and with man." That's what I'm circling. I'm circling the promises of God, because now I can pray with the holy confidence. But some fun stories among them. Boy, there are a lot of major league baseball coaches, met with one last week who was in town playing the Nats. Some NFL football coaches and players, a lot of people circling baseball fields and basketball courts. And this is kind of fun. Can I let you in on a little secret? Last year, the chaplain for the Golden State Warriors gave *Draw the Circle*, the 40 day prayer challenge, to his team on the first day of the playoffs. And who won the NBA championship last year?

I'm not saying that's why they won, but I'm not saying that it's not either. Who knows? And so a lot of people circling a lot of things in prayer, but let's jump into the word. And I want to share out of Acts 10, starting in verse number one. At Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion, and what was known as the Italian regimen. He and all his family were devout and God fearing. He gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. Can I just say this? That when you pray to God regularly, God will do irregular things on a regular basis. I don't know how else to say it than, when I pray, coincidences happen. And when I don't, they don't. And I don't believe they're coincidences. I believe that they are providences, because I believe there is a

God in Heaven who is preparing good works in advance, who is ordering our footsteps, who is going before us.

Prayer is the difference between the best we can do and the best God can do. I want the best God can do. And when we pray, what happens is this, because I think there are a lot of people who are trying to do the will of God. They're fighting for God, if you will. But when we pray, God begins to fight our battles for us. And so it says that Cornelius prayed to God regularly. I mean, really, that's about all I need to know about him, but let's keep going. It says one day, at about three in the afternoon, he had a vision. You know what I love about this? Can we just be real with each other today? What is the least likely time for you to get a vision from God, about three o'clock in the afternoon, because circadian rhythm dips, right?

I'm hurting around three o'clock in the afternoon. But when you pray to God, when you keep doing the right thing day in and day out, you better watch out, because God is going to show up and show off, and you never know where that vision is going to come from. It says he got to vision from God. He distinctly saw an angel of God who had come to him and said, "Cornelius." Cornelius stared at him in fear and said, "What is it, Lord?" And the angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God." Now I want to stop right here, because I think, before we pray together, and that's why we're here, we're here to pray, but I think we've got to remind ourself the power of prayer, so that when we pray, we pray with the kind of faith that God wants us to have.

Let me share a little bit of my story. Anybody have praying grandparents in the house? What a gift from God. I had a grandfather who had a little habit that at night before he went to bed, he was hard of hearing, so he would take off his hearing aid, he would put it in on his nightstand, he would kneel next to his bed, and he would begin in to pray for our family. And he couldn't hear himself, but everybody else in the house could hear him. And so some of my earliest memories are hearing my grandfather pray for me. What a powerful thing. Now, stick with me. There have been moments in my life, and you've had these moments too, where God does something in your life that you know you didn't do anything to deserve. Aren't those the greatest moments? "God, how did I get here? How did that happen?"

Well, here's the thing. It wasn't you. You are the answer to someone's prayers that you don't even know about. And so there have been moments that the spirit of God has said, "Mark, the prayers of your grandfather are being answered in your life right now." When we pray... Here's some good news. I tend to pray for something over here. And then by the time God answers it over here, I forgot what I prayed for over there. And by the way, that's why next to my Bible, my prayer journal is sacred, because I want to remember what I'm praying for. And there are things. If you looked in my journal, you would see things circled in prayer, and some things that would've been circled for years and years before they ever happened. And so, we tend to forget, and so then

we fail to give God the glory that He deserves. But here's the good news. God does not forget. Every one of those prayers are a memorial offering to God.

This is a city of memorials, the Washington Monument. My kids grew up here. We live on Capitol Hill, and my three kids have grown up here. So when we drove by the Washington Monument, they call it the giant pencil, which I think is kind of cute. I forget how many marble stones it is. I want to say something like 3,641, but don't quote me on that. But it's a lot of marble stones that make up that monument. Now, are you tracking with me? When we pray, it's a stone. And we pray again and it's another stone. We are building a memorial offering to God. And we may forget, but there is a God in Heaven who does not forget. In fact, He's going to answer the... I think one of the greatest moments in Heaven, when we cross that space time continuum and we enter this dimension that the Bible calls Heaven, I think God is going to begin to connect the dots between nations and generations, and show us the answers to prayer that then created this domino effect that changed the trajectory of our lives.

And I dare say, there's not a single person that won't have one of these crazy crisscross testimonies of God's faithfulness and God's sovereignty. And so Cornelius has this vision. Angel says your prayers have come up as a memorial offering. And then he says, "Now, send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon, who was called Peter. He's staying with Simon, the Tanner. His house is by the sea. When the angel who had spoken to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants, and a devout soldier was one of his attendants, he told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa. And that's where we just keep reading as if nothing happened. But this is huge. In the first century, average person never traveled outside a 30 mile radius of their birthplace. Anybody know how far it is from Caesarea to Joppa? 32 miles. What's happening here? I'll tell you what's happening.

God's never going to tell us to do anything that's outside his good, pleasing, and perfect will as revealed in Scripture, yes? But He'll often call you to do something you haven't done before. He will get you out of your comfort zone. In fact, here's our problem. I think we want God to do so new while we keep doing the same old thing. And I think it doesn't work that way. We've got to make sure that there are moments where, by faith... Listen, you know how we got here? Because when I was 22, we tried to plant a church in Chicago, because when you're 22, you think you know everything. And we didn't, and the church plant failed, but it took a 595 mile step of faith where we packed everything into a U-Haul. We had nowhere to live. We had no guaranteed salary.

But you know what? It was our way of saying, "God, I'm going to go to Joppa. I'm going to step outside of this 30 mile radius." And when we begin... In fact, aren't we doing that today? As we pray in this city, I mean, we could stay where we are. God can hear us wherever you live, right? But the truth is, there's something about coming to a place like this. There was faith involved in getting on an airplane or driving here, and I believe that God is going to honor that in a unique way. And so what we have is one person praying. And I want to show

you what happens when two people pray, verse nine. "About noon the following day, as they were on their journey approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray." And I've got to pause here for a moment. I'll try to make this quick. In 1996, on an August day, I was doing devotions. I was reading Joshua 1, and the Lord quickens something to my spirit where it says, "I will give you everywhere you set your foot."

And I felt like God was calling me to pray a perimeter around Capitol Hill. Now I'll be honest, it would've been easier to stay in my air conditioned office, which was a second bedroom in our home at the time, but I felt like I need to, just like the Israelites circled Jericho, just by faith, step out in faith and circle. And so 4.7 miles, a few hours later, because it was a slow walk. And I had no idea what God would do. I'll be honest, wasn't praying for buildings or properties or anything like that. Was praying for souls, and God has answered those prayers. But can I tell you this? I would've walked right underneath this marquee 22 years ago, having no idea that we would own it. I would walk by property three blocks down, a 29.2 million dollar castle that we now own, which we signed 18 years to the day from the day that I did that. Is that coincidence. I think not.

Six properties on that prayer circle. Now, is it about buildings? No, you can't even go to church because you are the church, but the promised land was land. And so sometimes when we pray, we don't even know what we're praying for, but God knows, and God begins to move. But I want to tell you about one other little piece of property. It was a crack house that we turned into a coffee house called Ebenezers. And I'll just say this about it. Four people offered more money for it than we did, two of them, real estate developers. How did we get it? I'll tell you how, we circled it in prayer for five years. And I believe Matthew 18:18, what you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven. Again, got to be in the will of God, for the glory of God. But when it is, the authority of God's kingdom is behind us.

So, we turned it into a coffee house. We've now served a million customers. Every penny of profit we give to missions. And now I've just got us say this. I have a little formula, the holy spirit plus caffeine equals awesome. It's awesome having an office right above a coffee house. And so pretty fun to see the way God's... And so all of that to say this. You know this little part where it says Peter went up on the rooftop to pray? Can I tell you my favorite place to pray? I go up on the rooftop at Ebenezers, and I pace and pray. And the funny thing is, its kitty cornered to the Security and Exchange Commission, which is a higher building. And we have people coming in all the time. We're like, "Who's the guy who just walks back and forth on the rooftop?"

I'll tell you who. It's me. And I'll tell you why, because sometimes you got to go back to the place where God did a miracle. I bet David went back to the Valley of Elah where he defeated Goliath. Do you think Abraham went back to Mount Moriah? I wonder if Zacchaeus has brought his grandkids back to that sycamore tree and said, "Climb that tree." Do you think Peter ever rode back out on the Sea of Galilee? "This is where I got out of the boat, and for a few steps, I walked

on water.” And I wonder if Paul went back to the road to Damascus? “This is where my life changed.” Sometimes you have to go back to the place where God has done a miracle, where God has answered a prayer, because you can't not have faith in those places. So Peter is praying. And you remember what happens? He has this strange vision of eating unclean animals. And I won't get into Jewish dietary law today, but it makes no sense to him. So he has a little bit of an argument. I love this part.

He says, "Surely not, Lord." Don't you love that? Because I'm pretty sure if you're calling someone Lord, the two words that can never proceed that are surely not. So he gets into this little argument with God. And here's what I believe. And this is for pastors and leaders, and that's about everybody in the room. Can I share one of my personal convictions? Here's what I've learned. When I get into an argument with God, if I win that argument, I lose. And if I lose that argument, I win. Can I just say, I really believe that most people and most of our churches are one lost argument away with God from a breakthrough, from a miracle. May we lose more arguments with God so that His kingdom can advance. Peter loses the argument. You know the rest of the story. He goes and he preaches the gospel.

And there's this moment in verse 25, and I'm going to end with this, verse 25. It says, "As Peter entered the house..." I mean big deal, right? We've all entered lots of buildings, walked through lots of doors, crossed lots of thresholds, but I like to call this the door to whosoever. It's like the rabbit hole in "Alice in Wonderland." It's like the wardrobe and the "Chronicles and Narnia." Because as Peter enters the house, you know he is putting his credentials on the table. We've got a few denominations represented. But you know what, Peter, he is putting it, why? Because at this point, the way, as it was known, was a Jewish thing. But this is the breakthrough. This is the moment. Whereas Peter enters the house... Are you ready for this? Whosoever will may come. Cornelius and his family become the first gentile believers, and the rest is history. And this is where I might ask a question. How many of you here today are not Jewish? Let me see your hands.

Well, how did you get here? I'll tell you how. 2000 years ago, a man named Cornelius was praying to God regularly. And he gets a vision from God at about three in the afternoon, but he has the courage to take a step of faith. And by the way, faith is taking the first step before God reveals the second step. And so he sends his men to Joppa. But what's happening? There's a guy named Peter, who's praying up on a rooftop over here, who has a vision he does not understand, but he is obedient to that vision from Heaven, and he risks his reputation and they meet in the middle. And the next thing you know, Cornelius and his family are saved. But God doesn't just answer that prayer one time. I would suggest that he answered it one more time, the moment you put your faith in Christ. That's the power of a single prayer.

Aren't you grateful today? Our prayers do not die when we do. Prayer does not have an expiration date on it. Prayer is the legacy that we give to the next

generation. It's Cornelius praying here and Peter praying over there. So let me close with this. About a hundred years ago, there was an evangelist named Gypsy Smith, born outside of London. You might know the name. No formal education, yet he lectured at Harvard and grew up in a gypsy tent, but was invited by two presidents to meet with them at the White House. Crisscrossed the ocean 45 times preaching the gospel to millions of people. And evidently, he never preached without someone putting their faith in Christ, powerfully used by God.

And so, one day, a group, probably not unlike maybe a small group that's here today, went and found Gypsy and said, "How can we make a difference with our lives the way that you have with yours?" I want to tell you what Gypsy said, and some of you know this story. He said to them, "Go home. Go home and lock yourself in your bedroom. Then take a piece of chalk and draw a circle on the floor. Then kneel and pray in that circle that God would send revival in that circle." Revival doesn't start out there. It starts in here. Revival doesn't start in a culture. Revival starts in the prayer circle, as we humble ourselves before God. And when we begin to pray regularly to God, God begins to move powerfully in us and through us. Can I say that I'm believing for revival in our generation. And not just revival, I'm believing for revival, and then reformation, but not just reformation. I'm believing for revival and reformation and renaissance, because until we impact the culture, it just stays in the church. But where does it start? It starts with prayer.

Roger Marsh:

An extremely timely presentation from Mark Batterson, lead pastor of National Community Church in Washington, DC on today's edition of Family Talk. In Second Chronicles, chapter 20, the nation of Judah is being threatened by the vast army of the Moabites and Ammonites. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah at the time, calls all the men, women, and children of the nation together and cries out to God. He ends his powerful prayer in verse 12, with these words. "Oh God, will you not judge them for we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us? We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." Friend, no matter how bleak things might look for you right now, as Christians, we all have the absolute honor and privilege of being able to go to God with our worries, our fears, and our requests. We not only can, but we should. Jesus tore the veil for us, and we should literally approach God's throne of grace with confidence. To learn more about Mark Batterson, his bestselling book, *The Circle Maker*, or the ministry of National Community Church, visit drjamesdobson.org/broadcasts.

I'm Roger Marsh. And be sure to join us again next time for another addition of Dr. James Dobson's Family talk.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the James Dobson Family Institute.