

A 4-WEEK TEACHING SERIES

ORDINARY PEOPLE // EXTRAORDINARY GOD

BY BRIAN ALARID
WITH ANDREW MARTIN

Dick Eastman says it well, “We can’t possibly know all there is to know about prayer, but we all have heard stories of God-on-the-move as He responds to the prayers of His people. *When People Pray* is an account of what happens when people *actually* pray.”

Over the course of this 4-WEEK TEACHING SERIES, we are going to go on journey guided by the Holy Spirit partnered with Brian Alarid and his new book *When People Pray*.

Join us as we discover together that “prayer is more about the object of prayer, Jesus, than it is about the outcome of prayer.”

Before we begin together, consider these questions from Brian Alarid:

“So, *what happens when people pray?* What happens when a man, woman, youth, or child pauses to pray to the God of Heaven? What happens when couples and families pray together? What happens when a city or state unities in prayer? What happens when business owners seek God for creative ideas to generate wealth and impact others? What happens when a nation cries out to God? What could happen when every country and people group on the planet are covered in day and night prayer?”

Let’s find out together.

WEEK 1: TRUSTING ENOUGH TO KILL YOUR OXEN

In September 1853, a small three-masted ship quietly slipped out of the harbor in Liverpool with a wide-eyed 21-year-old aboard. The ship and its crew set their course for a foreign land that was just coming into the Christian West’s awareness. At the time, there were only a handful of missionaries who dared to venture to the far away land where difficulty was promised, food was strange, and the language and culture had proven to be more than challenging.

Just twenty years before there had had been a young Methodist couple, James and Amelia Taylor, who were so passionate about the advancement of the Kingdom of God to the unknown Far East that they had regularly prayed that their newborn son might be raised up for that purpose. They had often been heard praying, “Grant that he may work for you (God) in China.”

Years later, the teenage Hudson Taylor experienced God in such a powerful way that the only words he could muster to describe his calling during his intense time of prayer was, “before Him with unspeakable awe and unspeakable joy.” Following this ‘unspeakable’ experience, Hudson submitted himself to preparation learning medicine, studying Mandarin, and immersing himself deeper and deeper into the Bible and prayer.

When the 21-year-old Hudson arrived in Shanghai, he immediately made a decision to dress in Chinese clothes and grow a traditional Chinese pigtail, it was a decision that went against the grain of most Protestant missionaries of the day. But Hudson was constantly remembering his ‘unspeakable’ experience. He was driven by his time of daily prayer to push forward, trusting in God’s plan, and believing that his work for the advancement of the Kingdom mattered more than the approval of his Protestant colleagues.

In 1857, he became seriously ill (probably hepatitis) and he was forced to return to England to recover. His passion never wavered as he continued to work on translating the Bible into Chinese. As his recovery continued, Hudson was also inspired to begin a special organization (China Inland Mission) whose vision would be to evangelize the interior of China. While he recruited missionaries to join him, he was often overcome with worry and doubt for their future safety in the unprotected interior of the vast Far East. Even still, within a year they returned to China. Hudson and his wife with their four children along with CIM’s 24 new missionaries increased the total number of China missionaries by 25 percent.

The work did not become easier, but Hudson continued to answer the call he had received so many years before in his teenage moment of outstretched prayer. Ministry was rigorous but under his leadership, CIM continued to grow its force, by 1876 there were 52 missionaries and then in November 1876 he announced that 102 more recruits would be added to the CIM team. In the midst of all of his speaking engagements and ministry opportunities, he battled depression and he was riddled with stress. Hudson is known for saying, even in the darkest times, **“When I cannot read, when I cannot think, when I cannot even pray, I can trust.”**

Read 1 Kings 19:19-21

“So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen’s equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.”

1. There is NO Power in Prayer

Consider this: Can you drive your car keys? (Think about how you can expand this example by talking about your car more extensively).

Just like there is absolutely no power in your car keys, there is NO Power in Prayer.

Too often we misplace the power source of prayer. It is not the WORDS that we say, it is the WORD to whom we are speaking. It's not the Bible, but the author.

“Prayer is powerless on its own, but it gives you access to Jesus, who is the power of God. Put your faith in Jesus, not in prayer.” - Brian Alarid

“Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father...” - Romans 8:34

“Jesus is the peace necessary to calm the storm...” - Mark 4:39

“Jesus is the power of God...” - 1 Corinthians 1:24

“Jesus is the all the authority in heaven & on earth...” - Matthew 28:18

“Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life...” - John 14:6

“Jesus is the Kingdom of God proclaimed...” - Matthew 4:17

“Jesus is worthy...” - Revelation 5:8

Even still, knowing all these things about Jesus, we sometimes struggle to believe. Why?

The writer of the book of Hebrews gives us a window into the lives of the faithful. See Hebrews 11:33-40.

Notice that for some it seems that with faith you always win, while for others it seems that there is no victory in site.

Remember Brian's words, ***“Prayer is more about the object of prayer - Jesus - than it is about the outcome of prayer.”***

There is a powerful moment of transition that happens in our lives, when we come to the understanding that we can be saved when we believe in JESUS. But our believing does not and cannot stop at salvation. TRUST goes well beyond the threshold. A life surrendered to Jesus will push us far past the door and propel us forward into a POWERFUL partnership with the King of Glory.

2. Your Breakthrough is in your Praise...

Prayer is no picnic... Prayer is Warfare.

But we are not now, nor have we ever been on defense. ***“Prayer is your first line of offense against the enemy, not your last line of defense.” - Brian Hill***

Life is Hard sometimes, isn't it? Name a time where you felt that way...

Prayer is the way that we interact with the only true source of POWER. Whether we know it or not or are willing to acknowledge it or not... we are in the midst of a battle between two kingdoms.

Surrender is not for sissies or for the faint of heart... Surrender is required for all who submit themselves under the Mantle of Jesus.

“Sometimes we don't feel like praying, just like a soldier doesn't always feel like training or going into combat. But what matters is that you show up for duty. It's the same with prayer. Showing up for prayer is half the battle.” - Brian Alarid

Just like Elisha, Jesus comes to us in the middle of our comfortable position (with our 12 yoke of oxen or our salaried job) and then He lays an opportunity that will require us to GIVE everything in order to GAIN everything.

- Like the man who received the gospel of the Kingdom of God and his whole world fell apart and then in the next breath it was put back together like it was designed to be from the beginning.
- Like the single mom who believed so much in the word of God that she wasted all her oil only to receive more oil than she could have possibly imagined.
- Like the daughter who died and gave her last breath, but through prayer she received resurrection.
- Like the son who gave up everything so that we could in turn gain everything.

Acts 16:25 tells the story of Paul & Silas in prison. Their story teaches us that ultimately **GIVEing our Everything** isn't about **GAINing Anything**.

“Your breakthrough is in your Praise...” Let that resound in your heart.

What if we turned every complaint into PRAISE? What if in every bleak situation, we turned to PRAISE? What if in every uncertainty and every sorrow, we stopped to PRAISE?

(Consider the sharing the story of Jim & Elizabeth Elliot.)

“I am not a theologian or a scholar, but I am very aware of the fact that pain is necessary to all of us. In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence of God and the love of God.” - Elizabeth Elliot

PRAYER IS SURRENDER.

Be honest. Have you ever thought: *if prayer doesn't change the outcome, then why do we even bother to pray?*

When Jesus retreated to the Garden of Gethsemane, did He pray the wrong prayer? There is no doubt, his first petition was not answered. Then neither was His second. But you know the story... Jesus leads the way, when in His third prayer, He changes his request. ***“Father, let your will be done, not mine.”***

What if your prayer is less about getting the answer you want and more about the need to surrender?

“Prayer is an act of surrendering your will to God's will.” - Brian Alarid
Your Breakthrough is in your Praise.

3. Taking the Position of Trust

Surrender & Trust go hand-in-hand. A life of Surrender will produce the habit of Trust, and habitual Trust will yield a life of Surrender.

Isaiah 43:2 says, ***“When you cross deep rivers, I will be with you, and you won't drown. When you walk through the fire, you won't be burned or scorched by the flames.”***

Trusting God's plan has the power to flip the script on the enemy's plan. What he intends to ruin you and bring you the most pain will actually become the place where you can reign with Jesus over the enemy's plan.

Still there are times when you experience EPIC battles with fear, doubt, anger, frustration, and disillusionment with God. But in those moments, recall Hudson Taylor's words, ***“When I cannot read, when I cannot think, when I cannot even pray, I can trust.”***

The moment the prophet Elijah laid his coat on Elisha the farmer, everyone who watched knew exactly what was happening. It was Elisha's call into an EPIC Battle. It was his opportunity... his moment in history to choose.

Isaiah 54:17 does not promise that there won't be any weapon formed against you, or that there won't be any call on your life too difficult or too impossible. What it does promise is that the 'weapons' that ARE formed against you won't win.

- Sometimes when people pray, things still can go from bad to worse. Sometimes, you pray and trust God, only to feel as if you've been let down.
- You pray, but your marriage still ends in divorce.
- You pray, but your company still goes bankrupt.
- You pray, but your ministry still closes.
- You pray, but your dreams still crash and burn.
- You pray, but your twelve-year-old daughter still spends every day crying in pain.

What if prayer is less about victory and more about learning to surrender & trust in God in the midst of your process?

PRAYER IS TRANSFORMATIONAL

Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, ***“For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had the veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord - who is the Spirit - makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into his glorious image.”***

The word translated 'changed' in verse 18 is the same word used to describe Jesus when He was transfigured. The power of the Spirit as you submit yourself in relationship to Him, can change the very figure of who you are.

“Prayer is less about changing people and circumstances and more about transforming you in the image of Christ.” - Brian Alarid

Consider Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for (trusted for), the evidence of things not seen.”

Trust is a position that we take when we find ourselves in the line of fire AND when we are experiencing the full measure of God's blessing. Trust is directly connected to the faith that we walk in. Prayer is rooted in TRUST. Most importantly, prayer aligns our hearts and minds with God's heart & mind.

Having experienced the call of Elijah, Elisha's first reaction is go back before trusting enough to move forward. But ultimately he had to make the decision to Surrender & Trust... even if meant killing his oxen. Functionally, Elisha eliminated his entire connection with home by offering his livelihood as a sacrifice to God. His only choice then was TRUST and move forward.

“Prayer is not about your ability to make things happen, but your willingness to trust God to make it happen.” - Brian Alarid