

CIRCLE MAKERS

WEEK 4 GROUP GUIDE | MESSAGE BY CHAD BRUEGMAN

START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer this question:

Completely unrelated to this series, if you had to listen to only one song the rest of your life, what song would it be and why?

SHARE

Welcome to our ongoing series entitled, "Circle Makers."

Bold prayer honors God, and God honors bold prayers. This series is based on the book *Circle Makers* by Mark Batterson. It isn't just a book about prayer, but about big audacious prayers. The type of prayers that the only way they get answered is if God makes it happen. The type of prayer that invites us into the adventure that God is already writing. Many times when we think of prayer, we tend to think of it as an obligation, something that we are supposed to do if we are a good believer. Other times, we tend to think of prayer only when life isn't going the way we want. So how should we pray, when it comes to our hopes and dreams, fears and insecurities or when we are in desperate need of a miracle?

How big are your prayers? What happens when God doesn't seem to answer our prayers the way we were hoping? Throughout this series we are going to take a look at how we can begin making circles around our hopes and dreams. We will begin to pray specifically for our relationships, family, future and grow closer to God in the process.

This week's message delves into the very real struggle many of us face. The struggle between believing that God can deliver us from real difficulties, which he can; or accepting that our particular issue is our cross to bear in life. For example, Paul had a real struggle that he asked to be delivered from, yet God allowed it in his life, which kept Paul clinging to God for daily strength. There are other examples, however, where people would boldly approach Jesus for deliverance or healing and Jesus would immediately encourage them and heal them. So how do we know which is which at times? Do we need to be bolder in our prayers and ask God to do greater things or do we need to embrace God's answer to us and find peace and strength to endure, persevere and bring glory to him regardless of outcome?

Let's read Hebrews 4:14-16

Do you tend to think of Jesus as one who empathizes with your weaknesses or do you naturally lean toward thinking that God is harsh and uncaring toward your struggles? Why?

What does scripture indicate to us about the type of throne we are approaching? Why is this of utmost importance?

GROW

So why should we trust Jesus with the things in life that burden us? Let's remember what Jesus came to do. In Luke Chapter 4, Jesus stood up in the public synagogue and read Isaiah 61:1,2, which is a prophecy about the Messiah and what he would come to accomplish on then sits down and says to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Imagine the tension in the synagogue; imagine the disbelief among the people. How could this simple son of Joseph dare to say that he is the Messiah?

They were so angry with Jesus that they tried to throw him off of a cliff, but Jesus passed through their midst and went away. Oh, how difficult it can be to believe that God will do what he says he will do even when he is in our very midst. The one thing these people were hoping, waiting, and praying for was now directly in front of them, yet instead of rejoicing, believing, and being thankful, they became upset and wouldn't allow themselves to believe the good news.

Let's read Luke 4:16-30

In J. E. Smith's commentary *The Major Prophets*, talks about the significance of this section of scripture in Isaiah 61, which Jesus read aloud in the synagogue:

The speaker in the opening verses of chapter 61 is not identified, but one can hardly doubt that it is the Servant-Redeemer. These verses should therefore be considered the fifth and last of the Servant poems. In any case, the speaker claims to have been anointed with the Spirit for the purpose of being God's Herald.

In his proclamation the Herald would accomplish seven things. He would (1) preach glad tidings to the afflicted; (2) bind up the brokenhearted; (3) proclaim liberty to the captives (4) and freedom to prisoners; (5) proclaim the year of acceptance, i.e., the period of God's grace; (6) announce the day of judgment; and (7) comfort mourners. In the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus read this passage and announced that it was fulfilled in his ministry (Luke 4:17-21). In place of ashes, mourning and a faint spirit, God's people would receive a garland, oil, a mantle and a new title ("oaks of righteousness"). These are symbols of the joy and strength of the redeemed.

What are the things Jesus was sent to do according to the Isaiah passage?

Which of these do you find hard to believe that God is able to do?

Do you think it is hard to believe that you could be "favored" by God? Why or why not?

MOVE

Chad mentioned in the message that God can always be found. Throughout scripture, we see people find help from God when they are bold and desperate. The two most common places that people will find God is when they are "out on a limb" taking a faith risk that they typically wouldn't. The other place is when we are finally "at the end of our rope." In these places we are sure to find God ready and willing to lovingly show us that he is very present with us in our pain. God is always closer than you think.

Do you think God might be calling you to go out on a limb and take a faith-risk or do you think you are finding yourself at the end of your rope and need God to reveal to you his presence in your situation?

According to scripture, there were very specific things that Jesus came to do and accomplish in his ministry on earth. Sometimes, it is hard to believe that we can know and be loved by an empathetic God who desires to favor us. Chad talked about how God desires to bestow on his people a crown of beauty instead of ashes and the oil of joy instead of mourning. God desires to take our brokenness, ashes, mourning, and despair and replace them with fullness in him.

Let's finish by reading Isaiah 61:1-3

Which one of these things do you most need to give to God today? (Ashes, mourning, spirit of despair)

Maybe you are in a really great place in life. How do you think you could encourage someone this week who might be struggling with their faith in God?

PRAY

As a group, spend some time praying for each other and the struggles that we all face. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to talk more freely.

TO GO.

Know that God is able. As you go throughout this week, continue to meditate on this word for you:

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Additional Reading Resources:

The Circle Maker is a great book on praying specifically for our lives, relationships, hopes and fears by Mark Batterson