

PRAYER GUIDE

The GRAVE ROBBER



March 2020



MEMORIZATION

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Matthew 19:26

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

February 23rd

John 2:1-3 - On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"There are days. Then there are days that define the rest of your life," writes Mark Batterson in his book, The Grave Robber. Obvious ones include your wedding day, while others can be as unpredictable as a blind date. The day that the public trajectory changed for Jesus came when He attended a wedding and the wine ran out. For 30 years, Jesus' miraculous powers had been kept under wraps from the public eye, but the day came for Him to step into His purpose beyond His identity as a carpenter. That day was prompted by His mother who knew who He really was. Yet, she wasn't speaking out of turn. See, the wine didn't run out by accident. His heavenly Father had divinely appointed that moment. We can all point back in our memories to a time when a teacher, coach, youth leader or parent said something about us that changed our perceptions of ourselves. It may have even set a new trajectory for us in our course of study or career. These moments were not happenstance or coincidence, they were intentional promptings that nudged us toward our future. In the same way, every believer has the capacity to encourage and exhort others to deeper relationship, obedience and love with God. To do so, His Spirit must be alive in us, so that we are in tune with His promptings. What encouragement or what compliment are we perhaps shying away from giving to a friend, child or spouse? Do we realize the impact that could be gained or lost depending on our obedience? Let's focus our prayer today on being so in tune with the Spirit living inside of us, so that we will not miss or underappreciate the divine appointments He has set for us. Miracles are waiting to happen in us and in all those around us. Father, we praise You for giving us Your Spirit to indwell, guide and prompt us. Help us to draw close to You as You draw close to us. Make us a conduit of your blessing to others, we pray. Help us to see the small miracles you are performing daily to nudge people closer to You and to reconcile the world to Yourself.

Personal Reflection: _____

March 1st

1 John 4:4b - ...the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

Have you ever met the right person at the right time in the right place, but have no explanation for it? That intersection with that person may have changed

something in you or for you in a way that you can look back knowing it made a difference. These moments tend to stick in our memories. In his book, The Grave Robber, Mark Batterson uses the term “supernatural synchronicities” to describe these unlikely, unexplainable, seemingly coincidental moments. He contends that God may be setting you up, especially if you’re living a Spirit-led, Spirit-filled life. In fact, many times you never get to see the impact you have on another. That’s why you must recognize these moments and seize them. God is always scheduling divine appointments between unlikely candidates, and if you let Him, they will become a regular sub-plot in your life. An unlikely meeting is exactly what happened during the second miracle recorded in the Book of John. John 4:46 says, “There was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum.” What early readers of this text would realize is that this royal official, who quite possibly reported to Herod himself, ran in different social circles from Jewish rabbis to the point of avoidance. So, the very fact that he would run into Jesus defied cultural norms and spoke to his desire to believe in the power of the One who was known to have turned water into wine. Upon their meeting, the official called Jesus, “Sir,” and subjected himself to someone over whom he had political power. This act of humility, along with his humble plea for help, stirred the heart of Jesus to heal the man’s son from many miles away. There was no laying on of hands required, just the dependent faith and the unadulterated seeking of a reverential heart. Do we realize the access we have through prayer to affect change in anyone on the planet? God has no space or time constraints on Him. Because of this access, we can have more power than those in power when we stay close to God and pray according to His will. As we reflect upon our circumstances and the people in our lives today, we must not worry about meeting the right person or having the right access. We should meet with God and trust that He will make sure the right people or circumstances come into our lives. Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your nature that knows all things and is everywhere at all times. Your majesty is worthy of all our praise. Thank you for seeing and caring about the individual circumstances of our lives. We pray for Your providence over our schedules, our comings and goings, and the divine appointments You have in store for us. Teach us to recognize the stirring of Your Spirit within us as You guide us toward the purpose You’ve designed for each of us.

Personal Reflection: _____

March 8th

John 5:7 - “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

The third miracle recorded in the Book of John describes the healing of a man who had been unable to walk for 38 years. Interestingly, when Jesus approached him and asked him, “Do you want to get well?” he didn’t reply with a simple ‘yes.’ He gave Jesus the reasons why he couldn’t be healed. In The Grave Robber, we learn how typical it is for us to make assumptions about what is and isn’t possible. Mark Batterson says, “We let our logical assumptions trump our theological beliefs. And before we know it, our reality is defined by human assumptions rather than divine revelation...God won’t answer 100% of the prayers [we] don’t pray. If [we] assume

the answer is no, [we] don't give God a chance to say yes." One of the secrets to experiencing the miraculous is to stop making assumptions about what's possible. We have to come to terms with the fact that the who, what, where and how of the answers to our prayers are not up to us. The crippled man assumed he had to get into the pool of Bethesda before anyone else "when the water is stirred." This superstition almost kept him from experiencing the miraculous from the Miracle Maker Himself! But, before we look down on the man and his ancient, superstitious beliefs, we have to come to terms with those of us who have "lucky socks" for game days or who play the lottery on our birthday or are more cautious on Friday the 13th. Not much has changed really. So, we must recognize that the crippled man's greatest handicap was not physical, it was mental. Are we the same? Are we making the same mistake he did by assuming the wrong things? Batterson says the only assumption we should make is that God is able. Any other assumption is a false one. "It's not mind over matter. It's faith over matter." Father, we praise You for being completely able to do more than we ask or even imagine! Help us open our eyes to the miracles You are performing and close our minds to the false assumptions we put on Your power. We surrender to You the things that our human minds tell us are impossible, and we put them in Your care. We trust You for the outcome in complete belief in Your goodness and sovereign will.

Personal Reflection: _____

March 15th

John 6:9 - Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?

The fourth miracle John records in his gospel reveals the time Jesus fed upwards of 20,000 people (5,000 men plus women and children) by multiplying a young boy's lunch of bread and fish. As with all of Jesus' miracles, there was something for everyone to learn. The disciples had already witnessed several miracles, but when faced with this particular challenge, their response wasn't to automatically turn to Jesus for the solution. Instead, they talked about how much money it would take to feed so many. As those traveling closest to Jesus, they were still prone to be self-reliant. When faced with financial challenges, how often do we turn to Jesus before manipulating our budget? On the other hand, the boy who offered his lunch wasn't as jaded as the disciples perhaps, and contributed what he could even though he couldn't provide all that was needed. How many times do we allow what we cannot do to keep us from doing what we can? And, all who gathered were fed to the full and witnessed 12 baskets of left-over bread be passed back in. Are we praying big enough prayers for God to reveal His abundance? All of these lessons and all of these questions should lead us to a place of reflection on how we think about God's provision. Mark Batterson makes this challenge in The Grave Robber: "Our desire for self-sufficiency is a subtle expression of our sinful nature. It's a desire to get to a place where we don't need God. We want God to provide more so we need Him less." He continues, "Everyone wants a miracle, but no one wants to be in a situation that necessitates one."

That's true, isn't it? The feeding of the 20,000 is about dependence. The disciples were dependent on Jesus to remove their blinders. The young boy was dependent on Jesus to multiply his offering. All were dependent on Jesus for their sustenance. We are too. When Jesus taught us how to pray, He said, "Give us this day our daily bread." What we really wish He said was weekly, monthly or yearly bread. Then, we wouldn't have to be so dependent upon Him. But, that's the point. Therefore, God gracefully puts us in situations where what we have isn't enough. If we want to see miracles, we'll have to be willing to find ourselves in situations where we need to feed 20,000, but we only have five loaves and two fish to our name. Father, You are the God Who Provides. Your Word displays your generosity over and over again throughout the course of history. Help us to transfer our belief in what You have done to what You can do now, even in our own lives. Thank you for knowing fully and accurately exactly how much we need to keep us in right relationship with You.

Personal Reflection: _____

March 22nd

John 6:19-20 - When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were frightened. But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid."

The fifth miracle recorded in John's gospel describes the night after Jesus miraculously fed 20,000 people with a boy's lunch. The disciples had already rowed across the Sea of Galilee earlier that day, hiked up a mountain, and acted as waiters to the thousands that were fed. On Jesus' orders, they were rowing back across the Sea of Galilee, this time at night, alone in the dark, and likely at the end of their rope. It was in that context that they experienced the next miracle. As is still apt to happen, an unexpected storm started to brew causing large waves and lots of wind right at the point where they were equidistant from either shore, about three to four miles out. Matthew records this moment with the description, they were "beaten by the waves." It was in this dangerous place, fighting a losing battle with no safety in sight that the disciples saw what they thought was a ghost walking on the rough water toward them, and they were afraid, until Jesus identified Himself. Then, as soon as they boarded Him into the boat, they were miraculously transported to the other side. They couldn't believe their eyes. Science has revealed to us that the boundary lines around our imaginations is drawn by past experience. So, the only cognitive category the disciples had to process someone walking on water was to assume it was a ghost. It wasn't until they had this new experience that their psychological borders were expanded. It's the same for us. The more we see, think and experience, the more we know. For example, musicians attending the orchestra have a deeper, richer experience than people with no musical background just looking for entertainment. It's the same with chefs at restaurants and astronomers with telescopes. But fascinatingly, when someone loves something so much to be an expert in it and have great knowledge, it's then that they realize how much they don't know. That is one of the lessons of this miracle. Mark Batterson writes, "True knowledge doesn't puff

us up with pride. It humbles us until we hit our knees in worship.” That’s why we need to embrace the reality of the miraculous. “The miracles of God make us appreciate the mystery of God.” If we can realize that the more we know God, the more we realize how much we don’t know, we will be in right relationship with the Miracle Maker. In fact, Batterson says, “Any less than mystery is idolatry.” Doubting God’s miracles downgrades our theology. But, faith is the opposite. Instead of putting ourselves and our understanding between God and His miracles, faith puts God between our understanding and the miraculous. This miracle helps us embrace that there is a reality that is more real than what we can perceive with our five senses. Father, forgive us for putting You into boxes, for attempting to create a god in our image, for our pride that says we have You all figured out. Give us the wonder of Your awe-inspiring magnificence, we pray. We confess that we want to see miracles, but we’re forever reluctant to be at a place where our strength is spent and we’re beaten by the waves. In Your mercy, guide us away from the smooth sailing that we so desire, but that leads us away from Your miracles. Help us to embrace the inevitable storms of life that give us the greatest opportunities to awaken to Your glory.

Personal Reflection: _____

March 29th

John 9:32 - Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.

Jesus’ sixth miracle, as recorded in the Book of John, brought sight to man born blind. Sighted people will have trouble understanding the scope of this miracle because we’ll never not know what something looks like whether we’re seeing it or imagining it. But, someone who is born blind has never made any connections from their eyes to their brain with regards to the actual image of an object or person. Their only points of reference come from the other senses. For example, if we hear the word “dog,” those who have seen a dog will find it impossible to think anything other than the image of a dog. The person who has never had sight, however, will associate the word “dog” with smells, sounds and textures. So, when Jesus gives sight—not restores the sight or corrects the sight—of the man born blind, He is also installing a whole library of visual impulses that science would say is outside the realm of possibility. The window of opportunity for the visual cortex to make any synaptic connections to the optical nerve closes within the first few years of life. Ophthalmologists would call the man’s condition irreversible. That’s part of the beauty of this miracle. Do you ever feel like you’ve missed your window of opportunity? Or, maybe there’s a health condition, a broken relationship or a besetting sin that looks irreversible. This healing proves that God performs some of His greatest miracles under the most extreme conditions. He is the God who says it’s never too late. There’s never too little. He is the God of second, third, fourth and a thousand chances. But, sometimes the miracle we’re hoping for isn’t the miracle we’re given. Sometimes, God doesn’t give us our first choice, but He’s not giving us second best either. The reason behind this miracle and all others is revealed in verse 3: “...so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” The man’s sight wasn’t the goal of the miracle. God’s glory is al-

ways the goal of every miracle because the will of God is always the glory of God. Hebrews 11 helps us wrap our minds around this hard truth. The author states that he doesn't have time to share about all those "who through faith conquered kingdoms ... shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength..." He goes on to say, "There were others who were tortured... faced jeers and flogging... were put to death by stoning... sawed in two... killed by the sword... The world was not worthy of them." All of them – those who conquered and those who were sawed in two – were living inside the will of God. And, they were steadfast within it because they didn't think of God's will only in temporal terms. Eternity must be added to the equation. Even if miracles are performed when we step into heaven, they are no less miraculous than they would be here and now. Father, we praise You for being the Lord of heaven and earth. We praise You because You are worthy. Expand our vision to see time and space the way You do, so we can better understand how we can best display Your glory to those around us. Thank you for Jesus, who walked this earth and can sympathize with our weaknesses. May we be strengthened through Him this day for His sake and Your glory.

Personal Reflection:

April 5th

John 11:25-26 - I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?

The seventh miracle recorded in the Book of John is the moment Jesus raises his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. Recall that Jesus had received word days earlier as to Lazarus' grave condition and chose not to go to him right away. It's important that we also remember that Lazarus, along with his sisters Mary and Martha, were Jesus' close friends with whom He stayed and visited frequently. They were believers supporting Jesus in His mission and proving themselves faithful at every turn. Yet, Jesus chose to not give them the miracle they desired and witnessed their suffering because of it. In fact, Scripture tells us that Jesus wept as well. Instead, He had a different miracle to deliver that would hold the keys to the greatest miracle anyone can experience, which is the salvation from sins through the resurrection of Jesus which brings eternal life with Him. Mark Batterson says it best. From The Grave Robber:

After asserting His identity as the resurrection and the life, Jesus pops a point-blank question that punctuates Martha's life: "Do you believe this?" Remember: Jesus hadn't called Lazarus out of the tomb quite yet, so Martha was still in the depths of despair. Hope was four days dead. Yet Martha responds with her simple profession of faith: Yes, Lord. One little yes can change your life. One little yes can change your eternity. The litmus test is the same now as it was then. The only question on God's final exam is: Do you believe this? It's not a multiple-choice question. It's true or false. And it's the most important question you'll ever answer.

Believing that Jesus is the resurrection and the life redefines our entire reality. When Jesus walked out of His own tomb alive, the word impossible lost all of its power. He had overcome all earthly impossibilities. And, when Jesus comes again, the resurrection of the dead in Christ will be a sight to behold. But, Jesus' resurrection power isn't limited to bodies. He resurrects dead dreams, dead relationships, dead existences due to sin and suffering. No matter what part of us may have died at the hands of sin, abuse, broken promises or betrayal, the Grave Robber wants to give us our lives back! He takes back what the enemy has stolen and returns it to us with interest. He makes the impossible possible. Father, we praise you for being the God of the impossible. We rest in the hope and assurance that nothing is impossible for You. You make beauty out of ashes and turn our mourning into laughter. Thank You for loving us to the point of death. We praise You for being too powerful to stay there. May we live each day in the hope that comes from resurrected life.

Personal Reflection: _____

Stay tuned for our next Sermon Series Prayer Guide: *#notmyJesus*
Starting Sunday, April 19th, 2020

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