

Why Not Here, Lord?

Faith-filled Prayer Breakthroughs

By John Robb



My cell phone spurs me on each time it powers up with AT&T's motto, "Rethink Possible!" Marketers, in this case, are good theologians—and Christians in the Western world would do well to take this exhortation seriously.

When it comes to praying for God's miraculous intervention, why is it so easy for us in the West to default to the position of unbelief? Why do people in the Third World seem to experience more of the miracle-working power of God?

How can we grow in faith and pray history-shaping prayers for our community and nation and world—and rethink possible?

A few weeks ago, while I was pondering a new development that could result in a new ministry opportunity, some friends from Southeast Asia came to visit my family. I had pretty much concluded that this "possible opportunity" was a long shot. But in that moment of wondering, my visiting friends presented my wife and me with a beautiful pewter wall piece etched with the words, "Nothing is impossible." I had jumped to an unbelieving conclusion. And their gift was a loving rebuke.

Assume the Possible

Why do we so readily assume that things will not go our way or that they're impossible to attain? I can hear the Lord saying to me as He did to His slow, unperceptive disciples, "Where is your faith?"

Our same visiting friends had been in Myanmar in 2010 to help launch the Children in Prayer movement in that much oppressed nation. And in January 2011, I had the privilege of joining hundreds of ministry leaders for a second, similar effort. Out of those two events, an estimated 40,000 children mobilized to pray for their nation.

Nothing seemed to budge in Myanmar—spiritually or politically—until the children began to intercede. Then, in short order, the whole nation seemed to shift. The military junta, which had dominated the land with an iron grip, released political dissidents from prison, including the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Greater economic freedom was granted. Reconciliation efforts suddenly began between some of the ethnic groups that the government had been fighting for many years.

Political news commentators did not know how to explain such a precipitous turn-around in a nation so long accustomed to tyrannical oppression. But the prayer ministry leaders believed that "God's secret weapon," the prayers of children, were a major factor.

When I was with World Vision, an international humanitarian and childcare organization, we witnessed the same phenomenon. As director of prayer ministries, I asked field staff in five countries to have the children in the program pray for their very poor communities for one year. All of us were astonished by the miracles that occurred in those communities where the kids were praying for specific needs: the infrastructural changes, such as digging wells and establishing new clinics,

resolving community splits, the healing of people with terminal illnesses, and the prevention of terrorist invasions in the places where the prayer was happening!

Staff people asked if we could renew the children's prayer effort for another year. After a second consultation, people recited an even longer litany of miracles to the wonderment of all. The Children in Prayer (CiP) effort spread by word of mouth to 20 national offices, and later about 50 of our World Vision national offices continued developing CiP efforts. Even after I left World Vision, the prayer movement spread beyond that organization with an estimated 75–80 countries supporting CiP efforts. This is all to the glory of the Lord who loves the prayers of children!

Learn the Children's Secret

Why are children's prayers so powerful? How can they serve as a model to us more skeptical, slow-to-believe adults?

Jesus taught that He has delegated authority to believers so we can even bring Satan down in our communities and nations. Jesus said He saw Satan "fall like lightning from heaven" and that the authority of Jesus will enable us to "trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy" (Luke 10:18–19).


Moments later, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was rejoicing as His people overcame the devil and brought deliverance. He joyously praised the Father for revealing these things to "little children" (v. 21). Apparently children have a greater openness to receiving such a revelation from God. The implication is that His adult disciples will be slower to grasp such a reality unless they cultivate the same childlike hearts. In other places, Jesus said that the Kingdom of God belongs to people who are like children, and that we adults should seek to be like them (Matt. 18:2–4, 19:14). Why? Because adults tend to be encumbered by the baggage of doubt,

fear, and wrong belief systems that keep us from simply trusting God to do what He promises to do.

We have become captive to a materialistic and non-supernatural worldview. We may not realize how deeply we have become affected by this corrosive influence. But if we ignore God's promises to do the impossible (if we will simply ask, trusting Him like small children depending on their parents), it is as if we, in effect, have taken scissors to Scripture.

I believe this is a major reason why serious and persistent prayer is not on the agenda of most Christians and ministry leaders in the West. We live in a material world seemingly controlled only by laws of nature, so we have imbibed the idea that prayer makes little or no difference. Humanism's teaching that "man is the measure of all things" has also crept into our thinking. Both are false philosophical teachings that cut off the realization that God is the One in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Let Science Increase Your Faith

In one sense, believers in today's world have a greater reason to pray with faith than earlier generations did. Science has revealed that the material universe —and therefore its Creator—are far more awesome than past observers could imagine. Astrophysicists now tell us that our sun and its place in the universe is comparable to one grain of sand on all the beaches of the entire earth—one of 300 billion trillion stars. The psalmist confirms that, because the Creator is so much greater than His creation, He "stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth" (Ps. 113:6).

On the other end of the creation spectrum, the cell—the building block of all life—is far more complex than anything a human being could create. No wonder Jesus could say that the Lord, in His love and concern for each human being, even keeps a running total of all the hairs on our heads (Matt. 10:30)—in

spite of our losing some in the shower each day!

Realizing how incomprehensibly awesome and great God is should turn us all into 24/7 intercessors! If we, in our generation, could internalize what modern science has uncovered about the greatness of the Creator and begin to apply His staggering promises regarding faith-filled prayer, our own lives, cities, and nations would be transformed.

Christian astrophysicist Hugh Ross writes, "Prayer is the most powerful capacity God has made available to us." And author E.M. Bounds says that "prayer can do anything that God can do." Wow, what an astounding resource we have at our disposal every time we pray—if we will only lay hold of the Lord in faith!

Believe We Can Change History

It has been my great privilege to be part of numerous national and international prayer initiatives throughout the world for more than two decades. Over and over again, my colleagues and I have witnessed the stupendous works of God when His people have prayed in unity, together releasing their faith. To His glory, history has literally been reshaped through these efforts!

Many of these prayer initiatives have happened in war zones where insoluble ethnic conflicts, full of atrocities, ground on for years—where all hope had been lost. Here are a few examples:

Bosnia, August 1995: More than 250,000 people had been killed and millions left homeless. But then believers from all three warring ethnic groups chose to come together in two cities. After a deep time of reconciliation in which representatives confessed atrocities their own people group had carried out against those from the opposing groups, they all prayed with unity of heart. In their combined faith in the Lord, they trusted Him for His intervention. They trusted His promise of

Matthew 18:19—that anything we ask in agreement will be granted.

Richard Holbrooke, the main peace negotiator, was amazed when the hardened dictator and war criminal Slobodan Milošević pushed a peace proposal across the table at him four days later. It led to the Dayton Peace Accords that brought an end to the civil war.

Cambodia, 1994–1995: The Khmer Rouge, a Maoist terrorist group that had killed two million Cambodians, were hiding in jungle camps. They continued to reappear and murder whole villages of people. Thousands joined in prayer with a specific request that “the Khmer Rouge would dissolve.” Three months later, on February 7, 1995, the New York Times proclaimed on the front page: “The Khmer Rouge are dissolving!”

Afterwards an international team of prayer facilitators led Cambodian Christian leaders through a process of repentance and reconciliation. Faith-filled, united prayer resulted in a noticeable change in the spiritual atmosphere of the nation. In just a few years, the Church experienced meteoric growth to more than 40 times its original size.

Sierra Leone, May 2000: An ongoing civil war (made more famous, after the fact, by the movie Blood Diamond), resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of people. In an orgy of blood lust, a force of 50,000 rebels hacked off the limbs of even small children as they ransacked and terrorized the whole nation. But then, 1,200 Christian leaders (more than 90 percent of the national church leadership) came together in desperation to cry out to the Lord for His deliverance.

The rebel leader was arrested after the first day of prayer. However, things did not improve immediately as hoped. Instead, rebel forces moved toward the capital city to attack. But they were repelled by a new alliance of militias and a British expeditionary force.

Participants in the initiative across the nation continued praying. In the succeeding months, the rebels voluntarily handed over their weapons to the UN peacekeepers, who broke them up and made them into farm implements!

Peace, security, and development returned to Sierra Leone. The current president, a Christian, helps lead the national prayer efforts along with one of our African colleagues.

These are a few of many stories from 58 national prayer initiatives around the world. We do not always see the same dramatic impact. But we always see God's gracious hand bringing about positive, tangible changes during and after such initiatives. They have resoundingly demonstrated that the Lord can use His people and their united, Spirit-led prayers of faith to transform any difficult situation a community or nation faces.

Get Desperate

In every case I can remember, such history-changing prayer initiatives have been characterized by the participants' sense of true desperation. Circumstances of war, suffering, or corruption seemed overpowering and impossible to change—by human means. Christ's people were driven to seek the Lord with all their hearts, realizing there was no other hope.

Of course, this is exactly what our God is waiting for us to do as well. He said, "If . . . you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 4:29). I believe this is the kind of desperation God wants us to cultivate in the West. Because everything here is usually predictable, comfortable, and convenient, we are often blind to dangers that threaten us internally and externally, spiritually and physically.

It is time to wake up, becoming both vigilant and desperate in praying for the Lord's transforming breakthroughs. Let's "rethink possible" and trust Him to do as He promises—far

beyond all we can ask or think—in our lives, communities, and the entire world!

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Applying Scripture to the Impossible

Throughout 20-plus years of ministry, and in many diverse situations in 58 national prayer initiatives, my colleagues and I have found certain Scripture passages and principles to be especially helpful in releasing our faith—and the faith of the local people who have participated in prayer with us. It is the release of our faith together in unity, through the enabling and guidance of the Holy Spirit, that “moves mountains” and accomplishes astounding breakthroughs in prayer.

Here are some of those Scriptures:

John 14:13–14: “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

The sky is the limit. We can ask the Lord for anything. We can accept the invitation He has extended to us, releasing our faith in His enormous capacity to do the impossible.

Matthew 18:18–20: “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Praying with others in corporate unity, even in twos and threes, can change the atmosphere of what is possible in

communities and nations. More than 30 times in the Book of Acts, and in all the great spiritual revivals and positive social transformations of modern history, we see that these movements have been preceded by united prayer. Theologian Walter Wink said, "History belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being."

1 John 5:14–15: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him."

Praying according to God's will involves both hearing His Word and following the leading of His Spirit. Faith will gradually build within us as we listen to the Lord, follow His direction, and then see His wonderful answers. In this manner we also avoid the presumption and flakiness that sometimes characterizes overly subjective praying that goes its own way.

Matthew 17:20: "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

God has enrolled all of us in the educational process of learning to trust Him with more and more of our lives. The Lord is always looking for faith, and He tries to draw it out from those who are with Him. Jesus did this with the Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter was ill, the father of the demon-possessed boy, blind Bartimaeus, and Jesus' own obtuse disciples (me included).

I often take a bag of mustard seeds with me to hand out before we pray for breakthroughs in difficult situations. They come from a seed specialist in my church. The seeds are very tiny black objects, not the partially germinated yellow ones from the grocery store. As brothers and sisters in Christ hold these in their hands together, they realize it does not take a

lot of faith. It takes only the willingness to exercise what we have. As we do, that faith unleashes God's hand to do His wonders.

Ephesians 2:6: "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."

Notice this is past tense. It has already been accomplished. We have been raised with Christ to sit in heavenly places with Him. Though we are still very much rooted in this material world, we are already joined through the Spirit to the One who sits on the throne of the universe. Through intimacy with the risen Lord, we share in His authority exercised by faith through prayer.

What an awesome position He has accorded us to rule and reign with Him! When we understand that and live in the presence of the supernatural, all-powerful Lord of eternity, trusting Him for miracles on earth becomes routine, normal behavior.

Let's begin to live and pray from that position so we can see breakthroughs for our world we have not yet dreamed of!

—John Robb

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