

Praying Circles Around Your Dreams



A dramatic legend about an ancient Jew named Honi, who saw God miraculously move to save a generation, is the backdrop of Mark Batterson's new book, *The Circle Maker*. Batterson explains how God showed up when Honi drew a prayer circle around himself, refusing to move until he saw God change his circumstances. Batterson builds on three tenets of prayer-circle drawing: dreaming big, praying and thinking long. "Despite what skeptics may say, God is not offended by your big dreams or bold prayers. He is offended by anything less," Batterson writes.

A Woman's Guide to Spiritual Warfare

When it comes to warring in the spirit realm, who said anything about women being the fairer sex? Certainly not Robin Kirby-Gatto, who releases her second book of the Glory to Glory Sisterhood series, *Princess Warriors: Engaging in Spiritual Warfare*. Kirby-Gatto teaches key principles for winning the spiritual battles for your family, church and community. Through in-depth studies on fearing the Lord and engaging in warfare, she shares how to master sin and simultaneously walk in the spirit.

It's About onething

What would prompt more than 30,000 young adults to pass up the usual year-end festivities and head to Kansas City, Mo.,

for a conference? Nothing less than an encounter with God. And at the International House of Prayer's annual onething conference (Dec. 28-31), that's exactly the focus. Onething leaders say they've stripped away the extras from their gathering to allow for extended times of worship, Bible teachings and, of course, the presence of God.

Marriage 101: How to have a real life together



Seattle pastor Mark Driscoll and his wife, Grace, aren't afraid to talk about sex and marriage in down-to-earth terms, hitting issues most Christian couples rarely address in public—much less in a book and interactive, DVD-based study kit. *Real Marriage* challenges spouses

to judge their marriage not by their wedding day but by what their last day together will be like. Will it come prematurely through divorce or will it be filled with regrets at the funeral of a spouse? Or, by God's grace, will the last day be one for rejoicing in a life lived together? In this study, couples will reflect on Scripture while using the *Real Marriage* book and video conversation-starters. Homework and

group sessions will help couples tackle the tough issues.

Blending Prayer and Church planting



In an effort to speed up the Great Commission, the Call2All movement has joined large, missions-focused groups with major prayer ministries. This month, Call2All's Global Congress in Los Angeles will wrap up its Nov. 29-Dec. 3 meetings with speakers who represent the ministry variety, such as Lou Engle of TheCall, Reinhard Bonnke of Christ for all Nations and Steve Douglass of Campus Crusade for Christ. The conference docket reveals no easy feats: For one, the group plans to strategize ways to simultaneously expand prayer movements and plant churches in every area of the earth.

Where You'd Least Expect Him

She wasn't wrapped in swaddling cloths in a manger; instead, she was tangled in sweat-drenched sheets in a crib. That's how Maria spent most of her days at the Guatemalan orphanage. The 7-year-old couldn't talk or turn over in her bed. She had little control over her body. Yet her smile could illuminate a room.

Maria (pictured) had been rescued from near starvation deep in the Sierra de las Minas, but the prolonged malnutrition left her so mentally and physically impaired that she now looked barely half her age and was bed-ridden in a room filled with babies and toddlers. Despite the intensive care she'd need for the rest of her life, her beaming grins came fast and easy.

From a natural perspective, there was no reason Maria or any of these kids should've been glowing with smiles. Most of them were birthed in horrific situations. A couple of the young girls had been tied to a post for two years and were merely 13 and 14 pounds when rescued. Another pair of siblings—babies only three months apart—faced severe health problems as a result of their father and grandfather being the same man. Incest, rape, abuse, drugs, divorce, murder ... these were the elements surrounding the children as they entered a dark world.

Giving at Christmas

Christmas is a time for memories. For me, putting together this issue brought back memories as we picked the very best Christmas articles over the last 36 years. While preparing, I reread all of my Christmas-related columns.

Some had to do with Christmas customs; others were about the culture wars to take Christ out of Christmas. Some years, I showed pictures of my staff or my young family and shared my own Christmas memories.

When we chose to include the best Christmas articles we've run in the last 36 years, I thought I'd pick my best column. But we soon decided I needed to introduce this issue, share my own memories and do what I've done at many times in the past:

encourage you to give this year at Christmas.

The Biology of Christmas

My wife and I have four girls, and I was in the hospital room for each birth. There was a normal amount of blood, but no serious complications. Our oldest took forever to be born. Our second was in such a hurry that we thought she might end up on the floor of a hospital hallway. Our third tied her umbilical cord in knots in the womb. And our youngest calmly slipped out as if to say: “OK, I’m born. What’s next?”

I had very little to do in the delivery room. My wife was the hero. She sweated, strained, pushed and gasped for hours. I stroked her arm a few times—and ate some doughnuts.

Normal births are amazing, whether they occur in hospitals or homes or the back seats of taxis. But when I consider the birth of Jesus, I’m in total awe—not just because of Mary and Joseph’s bumpy ride from Nazareth, Mary’s lack of a doctor (and no anesthesia!) and the crudeness of the manger, but also because of how Jesus was conceived. Mary was a virgin. Joseph, the “father,” had nothing to do but stand in the background.

10 Basic Blessings You Should Be Thankful For

Americans today face economic challenges, but we have nothing

to complain about.

We Americans are a blessed people, but we are also spoiled. I know I am. I can get flustered over the stupidest things—like when my cellphone doesn't get a good signal, when a flight is delayed or when my computer takes too long to load a website. Most people in the world don't have iPhones, can't afford air travel and don't have computers. My impatience reveals my ungrateful spirit.

So how can we avoid this virus of selfish immaturity? Thankfulness is the antidote. It melts our pride and crushes our sense of entitlement. It reminds us that everything we have comes from God, and that His mercy is the only reason we are blessed.

I pray you will invite the Holy Spirit to convict you of any whining. Here's a list of 10 blessings that many people in the world don't have. Go over this list and then see if you still have anything to gripe about.

1. Got clean water? The next time you uncap a bottle of water or grab a drink from the tap, remember that one in eight people in the world (that's 884 million people) lack access to clean water supplies. Millions of women around the world spend several hours a day collecting water. When you take a five-minute shower, you use more water than a typical person in a developing country uses in a whole day.

2. Do you have a bathroom? About 40 percent of the world's population (2.6 billion people) do not have toilets. Lack of sanitation facilities spreads disease and is a major reason why more than 2 million people die annually of diarrhea.

3. How's your electricity? The power in my house might be interrupted briefly three times a year because of Florida storms. But 1.6 billion people—a quarter of humanity—live without any electricity. And, because of unreliable infrastructure, at least 2 billion people on earth don't have

any light at night.

4. Got a roof over your head? One billion people live in slums. That's almost one-sixth of the world's population. Of this total, 640 million children live without adequate shelter; they live in cardboard boxes, tin-roofed shacks, one-room mud huts or filthy, crowded tenements. It's been estimated that 1.4 billion people will live in slums by 2020. Meanwhile here in the United States, between 2.3 to 2.5 million people are classified as homeless.

5. Is there food on your table? In the United States we are battling an obesity epidemic. Yet according to UNICEF, 22,000 children die each day due to poverty. Approximately 790 million people in the developing world are chronically undernourished, and almost 28 percent of all children in developing countries are estimated to be underweight or stunted.

6. Got a stove? In developing countries, some 2.5 billion people use fuelwood, charcoal or animal dung to meet their energy needs for cooking. In sub-Saharan Africa, more than 80 percent of the population depends on these crude, traditional means for cooking, as do over half of the populations of India and China. The really sad part: Indoor air pollution resulting from the use of solid fuels claims the lives of 1.5 million people each year, more than half of them below the age of 5.

7. Got regular income? You may have had to take a pay cut during the recession. But keep in mind that at least 80 percent of humanity lives on less than \$10 a day. The world's average income is about \$7,000 a year. Still, only about 19 percent of the world's population lives in countries with per capita incomes at least this high.

8. Did you go to school? Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names. Enrollment data shows that about 72 million children of

primary school age in the developing world were not in school in 2005 (and 57 percent of them were girls).

9. Are you generally healthy? Americans face illness like people in other nations—and more than 12 million Americans are battling cancer in any given year. But many of us have access to health care. In the developing world, more than 2.2 million children die each year because they are not immunized. An estimated 40 million people in developing countries are living with HIV/AIDS. Every year there are 350–500 million cases of malaria, with 1 million fatalities, mostly in Africa.

10. Are you free to worship God? More than 400 Christians die for their faith *every day* around the world, and most of these believers suffer in Islamic countries—although the top hot spot for Christian persecution, according to Open Doors International, is the atheist regime of North Korea.

In these tough economic times you may feel the urge to complain. Be thankful instead! God calls us to live above this negativity. When we give thanks in all things, God gives us a supernatural attitude adjustment. When we thank God for all He has given us, acknowledging that we don't deserve His goodness, our grumbling melts into gratitude and our impatience turns to praise.

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The Trap of Self-Pity

Their father Jacob said to them, “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you

want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!" **-Genesis
42:36**