

# Disrupt the Status Quo

## Learn to Pray Faith-Filled Book-of-Acts Prayers

By Sue Detweiler



After 28 years of life and ministry in Nashville, TN, our hearts were being stirred. My husband and I fasted, sought counsel, and prayed risky prayers:

“God, we are Your servants. We are willing to go *anywhere* You want us to go. We will do *anything* You want us to do. We are willing to serve *anyone* You call us to serve.”

After considering established ministries in Virginia or North Carolina, I sensed God was doing something new. I prayed, “God! What are You doing? Make it clear!”

One day I awakened with a vision of Texas surrounded in flames. It was a compelling picture in my mind that Texas was outlined by fire. I wept as I sensed God answering our prayers. God was calling us to this big state to plant a church and prepare leaders for revival.

Why did we need such a compelling picture?

When Wayne and I first moved to Nashville to plant a church, I was 22 and finishing college, and Wayne had graduated from seminary. We loaded up our newlywed furniture, packed our bags, and moved. It didn't seem like a big deal.

But this Texas move meant leaving adult children and a community we loved. We felt secure in Nashville. We weren't moving to a "job" as a pastor or educator; our denomination was *sending* us to initiate a new work.

Most of us have faced life-altering transitions. How do we pray and listen to God when we have our own preconceived ideas? To pray risky prayers requires leaving the comfortable to receive God's promises.

I have come to this realization about faith-based, Book-of-Acts-style prayer:

Faith unlocks the door to prayer and opens the way to God's presence. . . . If you want to learn about prayer, you have to have faith. You have to believe that God rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). To be diligent is to actively pursue God.<sup>1</sup>

Our eager, earnest pursuit of God captivates His heart. When we seek Him, we'll find Him. But He may answer us in surprising ways. If we have built a box defining who God is, He will certainly break out of our box!

## **Preconceptions Broken**

Many breakout stories in Acts introduce a new Kingdom operating system, but Cornelius and Peter discovered a new way of thinking, processing, and understanding God—a dramatic, far-reaching moment in the early Church's history.

Although Cornelius was a devout, God-fearing man, the newly forming Judeo-Christian community would not have considered Cornelius “one of us.” The Jews, after all, were God’s chosen. They wouldn’t have imagined this scene: an angel appearing to someone outside their fellowship:

“Cornelius!” the angel said. Cornelius stared at him in terror. “What is it, sir?” he asked the angel. And the angel replied, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have been received by God as an offering!” (Acts 10:3-4, nlt).

What? A Gentile could capture the attention of God?

Today, we tend to think we know who’s in or out with God, too.

But Jesus’ Kingdom had already abolished the world’s system, turning everything upside down. The new community of faith challenged the boundaries and upset the status quo.

The angel instructed Cornelius to send men to Joppa, to summon a man named Simon Peter. Cornelius obeyed immediately—no argument, simply expectation and excitement.

## **Boundaries Redefined**

The same day, Peter was seeking God on a rooftop. Peter fell into a trance, and God rocked his world. God gave him a vision: The sky opened and a sheet came down, filled with detestable animals forbidden in Jewish diets.

A voice said, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat them.”

But Peter argued—with God! Never had Peter eaten forbidden foods. (See Acts 10:10–14, nlt.)

We dare not be too critical of Peter’s resistance. Our own closely held disciplines of devotion may help us know God better, but the humble continue to mature through prayer.

Prayer is as natural as breathing. . . . Prayer is not “doing our religious duty.” We are called to pray big, risky prayers that require an answer from the One who is more powerful than anyone in the universe.<sup>2</sup>

Peter knew God intimately, yet he found himself at odds with God’s fresh Word. Carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth required a “new wineskin,” new ways of thinking and being.

## **A Deeper Call**

Personal spiritual growth is rooted in a deepening prayer life—one that changes status-quo thinking. As we engage in prayer, God leads us outside our walls into His Kingdom harvest.

Peter’s challenging vision transformed him for Kingdom opportunities. While Peter puzzled over the vision, the Holy Spirit spoke: “Three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them” (10:19–20).

God was moving supernaturally. Yet Peter had to make a choice: Would he allow God to challenge and expand his worldview to include Gentile salvation?

In a similar way, we can choose to stay within status-quo boundaries, or we can choose to go deeper, allowing God to rock our world and expand *His* Kingdom.

You have the power to choose what God chooses. You have been invited to walk with the God of the universe to make history happen.<sup>3</sup>

Peter and Cornelius were making history together as they responded to the supernatural move of God’s Spirit. He had to show Peter the vision three times because Peter did not

understand. But his heart was committed to following God. Both Peter and Cornelius *obeyed God and opened the door to each other.*

In prayer Peter was transformed. Yes, he began by arguing with God. It's a common response. But opening his heart through prayer shattered the "Jews-only" status quo. Peter now knew—and could proclaim to the world—that Jesus' salvation is the hope of *all* nations.

## **A History-Maker Calling**

We make history when we open our hearts to God and others through prayer. He wants us to go beyond our list of personal concerns, to ask Him for the nations (Ps. 2:8).

When Wayne and I were planting our first church in Nashville, one of our team members volunteered to watch my toddler two mornings a week. I saw this as a way to accomplish more on my to-do list. However, as I prayed, God made it clear that He was inviting me to listen to His voice and learn greater obedience.

I cleared the schedule on those two mornings and set my heart to seek God. As I listened for the whisper of His voice, He began sending me on prayer missions.

One morning in the late '80s, I went to the Ryman Auditorium. One hundred years earlier, a rough riverboat captain, Thomas Ryman, was transformed in a tent revival, and he financed an impressive auditorium to house revivals in Nashville.

On that morning, as I marched around the deserted building, it didn't look impressive. But I encountered a man named Ray Hughes, who had been sent there that day to pray for an outpouring of God's Spirit. Eventually Ryman Auditorium was renovated, and Ray Hughes planted a church there.

Why do I tell this story? When we daily pray and act on what we hear, we extend God's Kingdom to be the hope of all nations. Unfortunately, sometimes we don't put ourselves into the continuing story of the Book of Acts. But God is still leading His people through the power of prayer.

## **Status Quo Disruption**

You and I are living in Acts 29—the “continuation” of the story Luke wrote in 28 chapters. What God did then, extends into our lives. If we want to step into greater faith and maturity in our prayer lives, here are a few steps we can take:

- 1. Develop disciplines of prayer.** Practicing the presence of God calls us to the deep rhythms of His grace. The following beginning points are also revival points. Whenever you become dry, go back to these basics:
  - *Daily prayer* cultivates intimacy. Maintain continuous conversation with God.
  - *Daily Bible reading* enlarges perspective and challenges the status quo. Join the surprising adventure of the Scriptures to imprint His Kingdom mentality on your life.
  - *Regular journaling* can record ways God is speaking today. Keep a journal close at hand. Write out prayers, thoughts, and questions, listen for God's response, and write what you hear.
  - *Regular fasting* cleanses the soul, purifies the body, and renews the mind. Cultivate a lifestyle of prayer and fasting, and you can pull down enemy strongholds and fill your heart with joy.
- 2. Break out of the predictable and expect the supernatural.** God has woven a call to significance deep within us. “We are God's handiwork, created in Christ

Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10). Expect God to interrupt your days and give you unexpected divine appointments. Respond to the supernatural by obediently going into His harvest daily.

3. **Break out of your friend circle and become a light to all nations.** God has called us to be like Jesus—overturning tables of injustice, becoming hope for the hopeless, and carrying His light to our dark world.

Accomplishing all God calls us to be and do requires stretching. Isolated within our own crowd, we won’t fulfill our purpose.

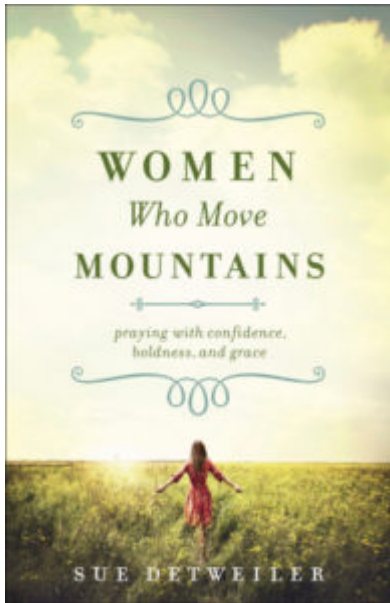
We can be history makers and light carriers. Our “Acts 29 calling” stretches us to pray risky prayers, to let God expand our vision, and to reach for God’s best—undoubtedly outside the box!

<sup>1</sup>Sue Detweiler, *Women Who Move Mountains: Praying with Confidence, Boldness, and Grace* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2017), 33.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 49.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 51.

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We Recommend Sue's book Women Who Move Mountains.