

The Road to Transformation - Prayer

INTRO: Imagine if you will you have worked hard for two years, saving up for that vacation you have always dreamed of - Hawaii, the Bahamas, Paris, Australia, Italy, or maybe China. Whatever your dream, bucket list vacation is, you have finally saved enough, booked your flights, and are ready to embark on this incredible adventure.

You board the plane, and have some of those cattle car seats to save money for the real fun after you arrive at your destination. Furthermore, you are placed right behind the exit row - you know those seats with the extra leg room where you can stretch out. The jealousy in your heart has you watching the lucky people as they enter the row. You dream of being one of the privileged that walk off the plane without sore legs from cramped spaces.

Just then, the flight attendant stops at the exit row to talk with the fortunate few. You hear her ask if they have read the instructions on the card for opening the door in an emergency. You know they have not because of your envious leering at them as they sat down. They say, "Yes" to her question, and "Yes" to whether they would be willing to help in an emergency. You begin to wonder how that could happen. These people have not even read the card - they have little to no understanding of what to do if something were to go wrong! You realize that a problem is statistically unlikely, but what if? If something happens, your life is in their hands. You think, "Hey buddy, my life is in your hands so reading the stupid card!"

TRAN: That desperate feeling you might have at that moment, that feeling of dependance on these people in the exit row - that is the same feeling we should have in prayer for ever facet of ministry in our church, and in our lives.

I. Review

- A. We have been talking about this road to transformation for our church
 1. So far we have talked about Christ being the center of life
 - a) Paul reminds us of that in Philippians 1:21 "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"
 - b) Christ is Life - living is Christ - there is nothing more important
 - c) In death what would Paul gain? CHRIST!
 - d) If Christ is the heartbeat of our life, imagine the amount of things that would change in our life, in the church, and in the world, just from that
 2. We also talked about the peace we have as Jesus commissions us to be sent out like He was sent out
 - a) It is about understanding that we live life on mission
 - b) We are missionaries to the world around us

The Road to Transformation - Prayer

- c) One of the things that has to grow and become strong in our church is reaching out to the people around us with the gospel
 - (1) Not only through acts of service - our church is quite good at that
 - (2) But also through speaking the gospel into people's lives
- 3. Next we addressed being relational
 - a) We know that visitors are not just looking for a friendly church, they want friends
 - b) Are we set up for welcoming new people into our church as friends?
 - (1) From entering the church service, what is the next step, the next place where they can build relationships
 - (2) Are we prepared to open our circle of friends to include new, different, sometimes maybe very different people into our lives?
- B. Today, we talk about prayer
 - 1. There are often a few areas that can tie for first place in most churches to be worked on
 - a) Dependent prayer really should shoot to the top of the list
 - b) Prayer should be the basis of how we operate
 - 2. It isn't just prayer we want to talk about today, it is the aspect of dependency that we need to emphasize
- II. Before we look at the aspect of dependency in prayer, I want to look at what makes Jesus angry
 - A. One lesser known occasion is Jesus being angry about the hard hearts of the Jewish leaders after healing a man's hand - Mark 3:1-6 (p. 1003)
 - B. The famous one is Jesus cleansing the temple - Matthew 21:12-16 (p. 988)
 - 1. The passage never uses the word "angry," but I think we can be assured that Jesus was quite upset at this moment
 - 2. He overturned tables of the money changers and the benches
 - 3. The part we often focus on is that Jesus was upset because people had made the Temple a marketplace
 - a) Not to mention they were likely selling things off for inappropriate prices
 - b) They were ripping off people that did not have offerings for their Temple sacrifices
 - (1) Think of it like ticket scalpers outside the stadium
 - (2) Only the stadium is not about entertainment, but worship
 - 4. Before Jesus calls the place a "den of robbers" Jesus says something very significant
 - a) He quotes Isaiah and says, "My house will be a house of prayer."
 - b) There are several significant things here
 - (1) First, prayer IS the proper use of HIS house

The Road to Transformation - Prayer

- (a) When we assemble, we should pray
 - i) They have been doing it since the early church as individuals and in groups - Christians pray
 - ii) If we want to see our community changed, if we want to see ourselves changed - we pray
 - iii) Change is God's job - our's is to depend on Him for the change
- (b) Prayer is the priority for all Christians
- (2) Second reason Jesus is quoting Isaiah is the accessibility of ALL people to a relationship with God
 - (a) Turn to Isaiah 56:6-7 (p. 738)
 - (b) Did you see what Isaiah is talking about?
 - (c) All people that worship the Lord will have access to God in His temple
 - (d) The moneychangers are basically price gouging people, and set up in the court of the Gentiles so there is less room for them in God's house
 - (e) God's house is to be a house of prayer, not commerce or a program of the temple
 - (f) Prayer needs to be THE priority over programs of the church
- C. Now, if we think about the things that make Jesus angry, and translate them into our modern times, here are some things we can say
 - 1. God is still looking for prayer to be the priority of His people
 - a) It is THE way He has given His people to connect in relationship with Him
 - b) When that is ignored, or downplayed, God's people become weak for lack of relationship with God
 - 2. Prayer should never be overshadowed or replaced by programs
 - a) How many remember getting "busy work" from teachers in school? I hated it.
 - b) I hope you are realizing how often God's people have replaced prayer with "busy work"
 - (1) Things that are active and look like life
 - (2) Yet they actually suck life from us because we are not truly connecting to God in genuine relationship
 - c) We will get to a practical application for this later in the message
 - 3. Prayer should never be thought of as a professional activity
 - a) God's house is to be a house of prayer for ALL nations (people)
 - b) In the church I grew up in we had a similar order of service as we do here

The Road to Transformation - Prayer

- (1) At one point in the service, the pastor would get up and lead in prayer
 - (2) In the bulletin that part of the service was called, “Pastoral Prayer”
 - (a) Even as young as I was I hated that title
 - (b) It made it sound as if the Pastor was the only one that could effectively pray to God
 - (c) Still bristle at the idea - because all of us have access to God - all of us are part of the “house of prayer for all nations”
 - c) I will give you a practical application for this point
 - (1) I think from here forward - at least for a time (and we can mix things up further down the road), we need to include a time of prayer WITH the congregation
 - (a) So I may start us in prayer, but time will be given every week for private prayer for each one of us to connect with God
 - (b) That can, and should happen even when I am praying, but too often it can turn into just listening to the pastor’s prayer
 - (c) So I think we as a church need to observe what God has designed His house for - prayer
 - (2) God never put time requirements on prayer for it to be effective - He just said pray
 - (a) The only requirement that I am aware of is to ask, seeking God’s heart - in other words, seeking genuine relationship with Him
 - (b) I think this could be a great time of spiritual maturing for all of us as we seek God in prayer, and truly make His house a house of prayer
- III. I want us to understand the difference between dependency and prayer by looking at two passages - one in the NT, and one in the OT
- A. Turn to John 15:1-8 (p. 1081)
 - B. This is a common passage when talking about our spiritual life and depending on Christ
 - C. It is not, however, often applied to prayer, but that is the glasses I want us to put on to view this passage
 1. Jesus gives us a great visual, but one that was aimed toward His audience
 2. Allow me to give you another visual that might make this clearer for our modern minds
 3. Here I have a power strip - most of us have used these before and know what they can do

The Road to Transformation - Prayer

- a) They allow us to plug multiple things into one outlet
- b) They also protect whatever we plug into them to a certain extent
4. Now, I am plugging in a fan to our power strip, and plugging in this radio
5. Oh, and this light too
6. Finally, I am going to plug in the power strip itself (plug into itself)
 - a) Why isn't this working? It's called a power strip, right?
 - b) Oh, the power strip can't rely on itself for power?
 - c) That's right, the power strip doesn't generate power. It depends on a permanent source for power
 - d) So if I plug it into this extension cord, which is plugged into that outlet on the wall - bingo!
- D. This is the kind of dependency that we have on God
 1. Verse 5 says, "apart from me you can do nothing"
 2. The reason the power strip didn't work is because it was relying on itself
 3. This dependency is true in all areas of the spiritual life, including prayer
 4. God gave us the gift of prayer for relationship
 - a) Part of that relationship is dependence on Him
 - b) We convey that dependence through prayer
- E. When we remain in Christ, when we are connected to the vine, when we are plugged into the power source, fruit grows
 1. It is a simple recognition that we can't grow fruit, we cannot see any growth or headway without Christ
- F. Now turn to Psalm 42:1-2 (p. 560)
 1. The Psalmist gives us another word picture for us to understand the dependency, the desperation we have on God
 2. The English almost brings out the full picture but not quite
 - a) The picture is a deer "panting" for water
 - b) This is not just a deer that has been running and is thirsty
 - c) This is a deer that has been searching for water in dry conditions
 - d) This is a deer that is desperate for water or it's going to die
 3. So the Psalmist is saying, just like that deer - the one that is so desperate for water because it may die, that is what their soul is like
 4. Verse two only continues the thought
 - a) "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"
 - b) The answer to that question for us today is, any time we want
 - c) That is the gift of prayer
 - d) We can meet with God - seek after God - because God is our prize

(1) Prayer is not about what we can wrestle out of God

The Road to Transformation - Prayer

- (2) Prayer is about relationship with God
 - (3) It is about how we depend on Him for life itself
 - 5. I wish I had time to tell you the story of David in full
 - a) David was well known for “inquiring of the Lord”
 - b) He did not inquire of God when moving the Ark of the Covenant and a man died because of it
 - c) The implication is David did something by not depending on God in prayer, and it was a costly mistake
 - G. With these two word pictures in mind from the Bible, let’s talk about how this applies to prayerful dependence for us as a church
- IV. Application
- A. We need to plug this understanding of dependence on God in every fiber of our church
 - 1. Any blessing we will ever see will come through prayer
 - 2. Every breakthrough for the people we are working to serve will be because of prayer
 - 3. Prayer should never be an appendage to anything
 - 4. Prayer should be the first thing we turn to in all circumstances
 - a) Several weeks back one of the men attending the mens’ bible study came in with much on his mind
 - b) When we broke into small groups, he let it all out
 - c) When he was finished explaining what was going on in his life, the other men spoke encouragement into his life
 - (1) But more importantly, we stopped what we were doing to pray
 - (2) We didn’t wait until the end to pray for him, we didn’t march through the bible study and then pray
 - (3) We just prayed for him
 - B. And that really is the first area that we can improve in
 - 1. We all have conversations all the time with people we are close to in the church
 - 2. When something, no matter how big or small, it needs to become a normal occurrence for each of us to stop and pray
 - a) If someone is facing a decision to make, regardless if its life altering or something seemingly trivial - great time to stop and pray
 - b) If someone is having difficulty in their life, great time to pray
 - 3. If prayer is to become ingrained as part of the DNA of our church, this is a great way to start
 - C. That also extends to the ministries that we serve
 - 1. Too often, I think, we believe that our ministry or means of service is small, we can handle it, and so we don’t pray

The Road to Transformation - Prayer

2. Examples:
 - a) What would happen if the Greeters or the Ushers for the day prayed before they greeted or ushered?
 - (1) What would happen if they asked for the Holy Spirit's presence to be made real to all that enter the building today
 - (2) Or asked for God to direct them to one person that really needed their attention - a visitor, or a member?
 - (3) How might God answer simple prayers like that?
 - (4) How might God change us when we realize that our ministries, no matter how large or small depend on God to transform lives?
 - b) What about coffee hour? What would happen if those putting on coffee hour prayed dependently on God
 - (1) Sure we can make the coffee and the snacks without loads of help from the Holy Spirit
 - (2) We can't accomplish fellowship - genuine relationship building for the church
 - (3) We can certainly ask God for people to make connections, or build on previous connections
 - (4) We can ask the Holy Spirit to be at work simply because God's people are together, and God can do mighty things
- D. What if we used the church directory for more than phone calls
 1. What if we used it for a prayer list - taking even just one family a day, or more
 2. Pray for God to be working in their life - for the Holy Spirit to convict where conviction is needed, to for the Holy Spirit to comfort where comfort is needed
 3. If you know them well, pray even more specifically about the issues going on in their lives that might need prayer
 4. Here is an idea that I heard of that I thought was very good, and something doable for our church
 - a) Each year we randomly assign members to other members
 - b) They are asked to pray every day for the person they are assigned to
 - c) Cards could be sent, little encouragements throughout the year
 - d) One person to get to know, and pray for, for a year
- E. What if we improve our processes for prayer
 1. We have grown in our ability to reach people with prayer requests
 - a) We have a prayer chain
 - b) We use Facebook to help with informing people
 2. How else can we dream up a process to up the prayer dependency?

The Road to Transformation - Prayer

- a) Maybe a text list that we have to send out a prayer request to multiple people in an instant?
 - b) There is a software site that the Council has considered that would help with prayer and much more for the church
 - c) Dream of possibilities
- F. How can we raise the level of corporate prayer?
- 1. I mentioned giving time in the service for personal prayer
 - 2. How do we shift prayer from some people's minds from a duty to an act born out of love of God?
 - 3. The Deacons are working on a "Prayer Calendar" - a monthly guide to praying for our church and community
 - 4. The deacons are starting prayer times through the week. Just brief 1/2 hour times to assemble to pray.
 - a) Beginning tomorrow, we will have prayer times at church at Mondays at 10 am; Tuesdays at 1 pm; Thursdays at 7 pm; and Sunday mornings at 9:45 am
 - b) If you can't make one time, come a different time
 - c) But we need to make corporate prayer a priority
 - 5. Corporate prayer should be holy moments
 - a) There is something special when God's people get together to pray
 - b) How can we raise that? What can we do to help all of us understand not just the value of prayer, but how much we really depend on it
- G. Finally, if we really are dependent on God in prayer, we need to rely on Him, praying for the community and those we personally want to see come to Christ
- 1. We cannot change anyone's heart
 - 2. That is God's job - so we need to pray and seek God's guidance and blessing as we speak to friends and people in the community about Jesus
- V. We end with having you pray with a person or two around you - you only have two minutes, so don't waste it sharing prayer requests
- A. Pray for each other
 - B. Pray for the church
 - C. Pray for our hearts to be lead to those that need Jesus Christ
 - D. After a minute I will close with our prayer challenge

PRAYER CHALLENGE: Lord, make me dependent on You in prayer. Do not allow me to settle for prayer being a last resort - make it my first priority. Help me depend on you in prayer for my faith, sharing that faith, my service, and in my love for others. In Jesus name, Amen.