

TREASURES OF THE TRANSFORMED LIFE 2: SATIFYING YOUR SOUL'S THIRST FOR MORE... "Drawing Water"

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. Philippians 4:6-7

So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. Hebrews 4:16

Well, we've primed the pump, through our commitment to God, and our willingness to give of ourselves in order to get more of God. The water has begun to flow, and we must now start to drink. The water we most desperately need to refresh our souls, and satisfy our desires is prayer. We've made the commitment to pump; now we need to begin drawing that life-sustaining water into our beings, and we do that primarily through prayer.

Prayer is the life-sustaining and soul-satisfying nectar that keeps us connected to God, to life, to each other, and to the world; and we must learn to practice it well, perform it regularly and perfect it eventually. And my friends...let me be brutally honest, and blatantly frank...it ain't easy! I'm ok at reading and studying the Bible, I do ok sharing my faith and living what I think is an authentic life...but I stink at prayer. Oh, I may do ok with praying in public, but that unfortunately comes more easily to me because of practice than because of my passion. I believe in prayer, the power of prayer, the results of prayer, the importance of prayer; I just don't do it very well, or near often enough.

I wonder if your prayer life is ever like mine. I've tried to rationalize that thinking any spiritual thought or considering God or other religious items might constitute prayer, and I suppose in the most generic sense, it does; but through this study this week I've again become convinced that prayer needs to be more intentional, more focused,

not filled with religious language...God is not impressed that we refer to Him as "Gawwwwd". God is impressed when we just call on him as friend.

I guess I don't feel quite so guilty, or bad when I remember one of the first things the disciples asked Jesus; "Lord, teach us to pray." I'm just a little embarrassed that after 52 years, I'm still asking! Maybe you are too. Well, today, I want to share with you a couple (there are hundreds more) of suggestions to help us all learn to draw water deeply, by improving our prayer lives. We've got time for three today. The second "Treasure of the Transformed life is Prayer and In order to pray prayers that nurture, sustain and satisfy our soul's longing for more:

1. WE MUST PRAY WITH THE RIGHT MOTIVES

And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him. And since we know he hears us when we make our requests, we also know that he will give us what we ask for. I John 5:14-15

You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it... John 14:13

Drinking deeply from the well of the Almighty begins with a consideration of the right motives. Correct praying has little to do with the forms our prayers take, or with the words used in our prayers. Correct praying has virtually nothing to do with the requests we make, or even how we feel about how we are praying. But according to these; and other scriptures besides, the motives of our praying are significant to God. We are instructed here to pray for 'anything that pleases God.' We are commanded even to 'ask for anything...in Jesus' name.' You clearly see the caveat, don't you? When we pray prayers that please God, and ask for stuff in Jesus' name, it's pretty hard to stray to far from the center of God's will. I loved the quote in our book under study: "Praying: for 'thy kingdom to come'...must be coupled with the commitment that 'my kingdom must go.' That's correct motivation for prayer.

What are some other right motives? I think that praying prayers that focus more on others than ourselves show a proper motive. I believe that prayers that maximize listening and minimize talking and making requests; reflect a proper motivation. I think that prayers that are honest, heartfelt, humble and unassuming will be more readily answered, than prayers that are demanding, filled with wants and commands that God do certain things in certain ways, on our preferred time table. I wonder how God feels when he hears us pray that way.

I believe God always hears the level of desperation that accompanies our praying. I'm not saying that every prayer needs to be a tear-filled rendering of just how much we love God, or how much trouble we're in; but every once in awhile I think God might like to hear how much He means to us, and how appreciative we are that He even listens to us; let alone answers our prayers.

Kind of like the story of a young teenager who wanders into the house and casually announces to his mom that he has lost a contact while playing basketball in the driveway, and try as he might (rather feebly) he can't find it. The mom, without speaking, makes her way outside and in just a few minutes returns to her son stuffing his face at the kitchen counter, and presents him with his lost contact. He remarks: "I looked for that contact for a long time, and here you come in with it after only 5 minutes; how did you find it so quickly?" To which the loving mother responds: "you were looking for a small piece of plastic, I was looking for \$150."

Our motivation to pray must reflect the value God places on our relationship, not the value we think it has. When I think about motives and praying with the right motive, I can't help but think about another favorite story of mine.

At the local church in a small Russian village the Parish Priest started handing out candy to the local peasant children as a motivation for them to come to church and Sunday School.

The candy was never free; it was always accompanied by the prerequisite memorization of a number of scriptures. One little pug-nosed pugnacious child drew the attention of the priest, and special merit was given him as he learned more scripture than the others, more easily, and subsequently earned more candy; which he consumed more readily.

The passages to be memorized grew longer and longer and by the time the young lad graduated to go off to university, he had memorized, and could recite at one sitting, all 4 Gospels of the NT.

60 years later, the deceased priest would undoubtedly toss in his grave to hear the notorious Czar of Communist Russia; Nikita Khrushchev; the child-hood memorizing prodigy, declare that God was nonexistent because his cosmonauts had not seen him. Khrushchev memorized the Scriptures for the candy, the rewards, and the bribes, rather than for the meaning it might have had for his life.

I'm afraid that our inappropriate motives for praying; might also produce equally tragic results. We must draw the deep water from the wells of God's grace, mercy and love; through our prayers, rightly motivated, humbly offered, pleasing to God, in Jesus' name. The second "Treasure of the Transformed life is Prayer and In order to pray prayers that nurture, sustain and satisfy our soul's longing for more:

2. WE MUST PRAY WITH A THANKFUL ATTITUDE

Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. Colossians 4:2

It's pretty obvious that an attitude of gratitude ought to accompany anything we have to do with God...Right? For a loving, creative God, to make a way for us to be forgiven, and live a rich, full, satisfying life, ought to leave us humbly grateful, and our prayers ought to reflect such an attitude. Attitude is everything, especially when it comes to the living of these lives.

But here's where it gets interesting. What about a thankful attitude when our prayers don't seem to be working? I found John Ed's reminder that God *always* answers every prayer intriguing. I'm not always convinced this has been true in my life. But when he mentioned that God answers ALL prayers in one of 4 ways; I took note, and you should too. He remarked that God answers some prayers **Directly**, almost immediately and often according to just the ways we asked. But he goes on to remind us that sometimes God answers prayers **Differently**, different from the way we expect, different from the ways we hope, but answered none the less. Often when we ask God to change someone or some thing...he starts the changing right at home...with us! He continues that sometimes God answers prayers **Delayed**. If I'm learning anything in my life right now, it's that God's timing rarely, very rarely ever matches mine! And let's be honest...whose timing is more trustworthy?? Finally John Ed announces that God sometimes answers our prayers **Denied**. Like when Jesus asked for 'this cup to pass', God answered no. Are we still to have an attitude of gratitude when God answers no? Yes!

I don't know if we'll ever fully get this, but the longer we walk together with God, God's purposes for our lives becomes more clear...or they will if we employ this strategy of maintaining a grateful heart, even while life revolves in devilish uncertainty, even while events and circumstances seem to spin out of control; God's purposes are being accomplished, even when they make no sense to us at the moment.

Up until 1973 an old man walked each Friday evening on the beach outside his Florida home with a bucket of shrimp that he fed to the ever increasing flock of sea gulls. It was his way of remembering...and saying thanks. The man's name was Captain Eddie Rickenbacker who while flying a B-17 on a Mission to deliver a message to General Douglas MacArthur, was shot down over the South Pacific.

For nearly a month Eddie and his crew would fight the enemies of water, weather, sun, heat, dehydration, depression and the occasional shark larger than their tiny raft; but no enemy was more formidable than starvation. Eight days after the final dispersal of their limited rations, and following that morning's prayers, Eddie was resting on the point of the raft with his hat pulled low to protect from the sun, when he felt a strange sensation on his head. He, along with the whole crew, knew it was a sea gull, and if he could catch it, they would live. He did, and so did they; using the bird for brief nourishment, and the intestines to catch fish which soon restored their resolve, and after a long month they were finally rescued. So each Friday evening thereafter this solitary sailor said thanks to the birds, because one of their ancestors had sacrificed his life, hundreds of miles from shore, for him. Our prayers must be prayed with an attitude of gratitude, for our lives were likewise saved, through a similar sacrifice. The second "Treasure of the Transformed life is Prayer and In order to pray prayers that nurture, sustain and satisfy our soul's longing for more:

3. WE MUST PRAY WITH A PERSISTANT WILL

Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened for you. Matthew 7:7

This verse introduces us to an interesting story Jesus tells his disciples...in response to their original question..."teach us to pray." It seems there was a woman who desired something from a local politician, and she keep asking, asking, bugging, bothering, pestering, at all hours of the day and night. Finally the official took her to court and pleaded with the judge to place a restraining order on her. She began bugging the judge, and finally in a desperate act the judge ordered the politician to give her what she wanted to shut her up! Jesus pointed out that she got what she wanted, because of her persistence, and her will! Interesting how Jesus used even a secular judge and loathed politician to teach an important truth.

C.S. Lewis once wrote: “The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking the other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.” It was that daily and persistent communion with God, which centered his life, and satisfied his soul.

I know this is where prayer breaks down for me; and maybe for others of us. I’m just not very disciplined, or persistent in my praying. What would it take to change that? Well, I suppose we could just pray about it...but I think God wants/desires/deserves some greater effort! So I challenge myself, and you if you need it, to begin today to be more faithful, more intentional, more persistent, more regular with our praying. And I need your help. Do pray for me as your leader to be a better example. I’ll pray for you to be better disciples...not of mine, of Jesus!

When certain African natives began accepting Christ, they were taught to go away alone and commune daily with God. So as more and more men, women and children received Jesus, there were paths cut through the underbrush to their individual spots outside the village. As time went on they would ‘encourage’ those who were backsliding or wandering from the faith by casually mentioning...”the grass is grows on your path.” I would like you to help me...as I try to help you; hold each other accountable, by maintaining the grass on our path to the deep well of God. Let us pray that we might draw the living water from that well, through our prayers. AMEN

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