

Series Big Idea: We all need more of God in our lives. Every struggle and every need is best answered by a bit more of God. And that may, in the end, be our biggest problem. How do we make more room for God in our lives? For thousands of years, God's people have learned and practiced ways to allow God to have more influence. In this series we'll look at four vital practices that allow God to transform our characters and guide us in how we approach our circumstances. By practicing any or all of these four spiritual activities, we'll discover that it is possible and thrilling to allow God more say in our lives.

Message Big Idea: Prayer is often a one way conversation with requests about health, financial, and future concerns. The lists that come out of our hearts crowd out the ability for us to listen. Practicing intentional prayer is crucial to our transformation.

Main Idea: Trust prayer to transform our hearts, not just fix our problems.

Main Text: 1 Peter 5:7, Jeremiah 33:3

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

- 1. What does your prayer life look like? Is it something you do on a regular basis or on occasion?**
- 2. The goal of this message is to get us more comfortable speaking to God. Read 1 Peter 5:7. What does "casting" or "throwing" your anxiety on God look like?**
- 3. How can you develop more raw honesty in your prayers with God? If you're already transparent, then how can you become more conversational?**
- 4. I'd like for you to pray together at the same time out loud. Cast something to God. After you're finished, debrief the experience.**

Main Idea: Trust prayer to transform, not just fix our problems.

Message:

This past Sunday was the Super Bowl. If you watched it, the game was extremely close and I was nervous until the last second. One thing that stuck out to me was all of the camera shots of people really stressing out. I wonder how many prayers were prayed to God during the last minute alone. How many bargains were made “God, if you do this, I’ll do that.” I’m certain that some people left their parties that night feeling like God heard their prayers and answered with a resounding “YES I WILL HELP THEM WIN!” For some they might have felt that God wasn’t listening to them. When that happens, we tend to pray louder and start sweetening the deal by saying “I’ll even do this for you if you answer my prayers.”

Whatever your personal prayers were or weren’t that night, I think today will help us focus and ultimately be more effective when we pray. We’re in our fourth week of our Making Room series. If you’re just joining us, I’d encourage you to visit our website and catch up on our other messages. We’ve been exploring different practices the Bible gives us to Make Room for God in our lives. God wants to use practices like slowing down, taking a regular day of rest, and reading our Bible & reflecting on its’ words to transform our lives. Today, we’re going to add another tool to our tool box and that’s the practice of intentional prayer.

The practice of prayer sounds incredibly easy, but I think it’s actually quite difficult for most of us. Some come from backgrounds where prayers are very formal. Maybe you learned a set prayer that you repeat over and over. Some are taught that prayers are like spiritual spells where if we say the right words that God will be forced to listen and answer. The concept here is that Jesus is like the genie in a lamp. If we rub the lamp then we get our three wishes.

But scripture tells us that God isn’t a magic genie and asking him to answer our prayers doesn’t automatically mean he will in a positive way or negative way. With our Genie in a bottle view of prayer, the focus is on changing God’s mind to fit my needs. I want him to do what I want him to do because I think it’s best. But sometimes, God is silent and it’s those moments of silence that it’s easy to look around at everyone else and feel like God is answering all of their prayers but not yours.

I think it's normal to feel that way. Especially in the thick of situations where we need an answer fast and God seems eternally slow.

Maybe you've been praying for the same thing for years and years and still nothing. You might be trying to sell your house, finally find that special someone and end singleness in your life, or you're wanting that family member or friend to finally know Jesus. These are serious prayers and close to our hearts. But what do we do when it seems like God is answering everyone else but giving us the silent treatment?

I think it's important to take these real emotions and confront them with truth. Let's look at a verse together from 1 Peter 5:7. Page 830.

1 Peter 5:7 says,

⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

The word "cast" here is an interesting word in Greek. Cast here literally means to throw. God wants us to throw all of anxiety, all our cares, all of our prayers onto him. That is huge! God wants to hear all about our little things and big issues.

Let me play this out for us.

[Act out]

Meek prayer about Job Interview vs. **Take it now** Lord Prayer

Meek-

I know you're busy and I probably haven't done enough for you to listen to me. But if you have the time...it'd be really great if you could help me out. I mean I know it's been a while and why would you want to help me. But, I need some help and so if you are really there...could you help me?

TAKE IT NOW prayer-

Jesus. I need you right now. Listen, I know I'm a mess but I need your help. Thank you for the promises in scripture where you say you'll listen to me. I know I'm not good enough, but you're good enough. I know I don't have what it takes, but you have what it takes. You paid the price for my sins and I claim victory is your name Jesus. I need you to help me be confident. Help me to think clearly. Help me not to trip over my words. Help me to be bold and enter with confidence that I'm not alone but that you are with me. I'm nervous. I'm anxious. But you say to THROW these cares upon you. Why? Be you care for me. This matters to you and I'm thankful for that. Thank you for being king of my life. Thank you for being there for me.

What's the difference here? Raw Honesty.

God already knows what's going on in our hearts and minds, and he wants us to freely share that with him. He doesn't want us to talk to him about it. He wants us to TELL him about it. God wants to have real conversations.

Personal story- Laura "hey God" Me: Father (had to have the perfect words).

But in order to be at a place where we can actually be raw with God, we have to first learn how to be honest with him.

Learning to be transparent in our prayers takes work. Prayer isn't automatic. We aren't born with an innate sense on how to talk to God.

Learning to be honest with God takes practice and it's a trait that must be learned.

Most of us learn to pray a couple different ways.

1. You might have learned to pray before a meal and before bedtime. These prayers for most of us are learned and we taught (either directly or indirectly) to say the same things over and over. That's normal. It's ok to say the same thing before meals and bedtime. But what about the inbetween? What are we saying then?
2. The second way we learn to pray is through adversity. I remember being a student and not having studied for a test but I prayed to God for a miracle A on the project. These prayers are ok too. But we aren't supposed to just pray when we're in trouble.

Formulaic prayers can be powerful and they do have a place in our spiritual life, but God wants us to also have free willing/open prayer conversations with him too. Recited prayers only consist of us talking to God. Conversational prayers include listening and allow for more connectedness. God wants us to move beyond just praying prayers that are memorized and also pray real, raw, prayers.

I remember times in student ministry when students were upset about something God was or wasn't doing. They would hold it in and feel like they couldn't talk to God directly about it. In reality, God already knew their feelings, but it made it official when they spoke it in a prayer to God. So my advice to them was simply to tell God how they felt. Students would say, "I can't say that to God!" I'd respond with, "why?" God cares about those feelings too. This isn't just for students. I've known adults that struggle with this too.

God wants us to THROW our prayers on to him which means he wants to good stuff too.

Let me give you some examples of what this might look like.

1. Prayer of about marriage
 - a. I made a vow but I just don't feel it anymore. Transform my heart.
2. Prayer of Timing (my one word): Transform my heart.

These prayers illustrate my main point for today. We need to:

Trust prayer to transform our hearts, not just fix our problems.

Now, regardless of our authentic our prayers are, we can't just THROW our prayers onto God, we have to position ourselves to listen to God too.

If we're just unloading all of our prayers on to God and we leave them there then we're really just confessing our thoughts. That's a one way conversation. God wants a two way REAL conversation with us.

Any real conversation two components to it: Talking and Listening.

We've spent some time exploring HOW God wants us to talk to him. Now, let's look at how we listen to him.

(I heard a sermon once many years ago when the pastor said "you have to listen to God. Story about listening to God...waiting a couple seconds.)

While it would be convenient for God to answer all of our questions in a matter of moments, that's typically not how it happens. So, how do we listen when He does?

In a time in Israel's history where they are about to be exiled from their land, God says something so personal when it comes to answering us in our times of anxieties.

Jeremiah 33:3,

³'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

All around Jeremiah he sees destruction. His people are preparing to be sent off into exile in a foreign land. So here he is in this horrible place at a horrible time. God tells him that a day is coming when things would get better, but it wasn't today. It wasn't anytime soon. But God was going to do something.

When we throw our worries and prayers to God, it sometimes feels like we're in a place of chaos. The Lord tells Jeremiah to call to him or in another words, "Start the conversation and then LISTEN FOR ME TO ANSWER.

If God isn't answering it doesn't mean that he's forgot about you or put you on ignore. It means that he's still working and his timing isn't ready yet. That's exactly what God was telling Jeremiah. God used this situation to change Jeremiah and his people.

Trust prayer to transform our hearts, not just fix our problems.

I'd like to try something today.

I want all of us to say a simple prayer right now. I want you to CAST/THROW something to God right now. Let's all say it out loud, all at the same time.

(PRAY)

We have about 800 people here right now. I bet almost all of us prayed and the most beautiful thing is that God has been waiting for us to cast these things on to him. For some of us, that was the first time today you've told God.

Now that we've talked to God, openly and honestly, let's practice listening.

Remember when I said that formulaic prayers can be helpful? Here is one that I want to use today. Let me pray this over us right now.

SILENCE OUR BODY, TO LISTEN TO YOUR WORDS

SILENCE OUR TONGUE, TO LISTEN TO YOUR THOUGHTS

SILENCE OUR THOUGHTS, TO LISTEN TO YOUR HEART

SILENCE OUR HEART TO LISTEN TO YOUR SPIRIT

SILENCE OUR SPIRIT TO LISTEN TO HIS SPIRIT

(MOMENT OF SILENCE)

I really hope God spoke to you today. If he didn't speak yet, it doesn't mean he never will. Be patient, continue giving him time to talk. He's listening, but he's just waiting on your timing.

This Wednesday we're hosting our annual Lent service.

A time to talk to God and really practice listening to God.