

The Power of Prayer

Series: Setting the Table

Brad Bailey – November 5, 2023

Intro

Today we are going to begin a short focus on how we create space for such connections...on what's involved in creating the type of space for others to meet God ...the kind of space where people can experience `God's grace

We may all have people we care about... some we have known for a long time...some may just recently... and we may want them to know God... but we don't know how to create a space to really connect.

So today we are beginning a short series... entitled **Setting the Table**...about how to join God's hospitality.

When you are invited to come to someone's home for a meal... what shapes the experiences... from how you feel beforehand...to when you first arrive...to how you experience those around you ...and how you feel when you leave...is **not defined just by the meal...but how wanted and welcomed you were... how included** you were in the whole gathering.

This is what Jesus embodies.

Read the Gospels...that testify of Jesus...and what runs throughout them...are his **sharing in meals**...and what is noted... is **never the meal... but the guest list**...and the **welcome he extended** to those around him. **It was the welcome that spoke.**

You can have great food... without heart... no one is there because we **didn't invite them**... or people may gather and just be pretentious foodies...and **no one is blessed**. The nature of **hospitality**... of a space that we are welcomed.

And...

Hospitality begins in the heart of the host.

As we'll see over these weeks...it includes the heart to **risk inviting**...and to **create space for sharing**.

But it begins with the power of prayer.

If we want to set the table that welcomes others to know God... it **begins with joining with God through prayer**. In the Scriptures, the Apostle Paul instructs his younger apprentice Timothy, writing:

1 Timothy 2:1, 3-4 (NLT)

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them.... . ³ **This is good and pleases God our Savior,** ⁴ **who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.**

God has a desire... and we join it through prayer.

God is extending something that we are either joining or not...and it begins with praying. He says this is "first of all"... the first thing to do. And we should pray for others with **thankfulness**...which means **actually valuing people...caring** about those who are lost. [1]

How does praying for those who don't yet share a relationship with Christ shape us?

1. Prayer connects us to God's compassion.

Setting the table for connection involves **actually caring** about people.

It's **not simply** telling someone they **NEED to be at the table...**but **that we want them at the table...**that we care about them.

Jesus [2]...

Matthew 9:36 (NLT)

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

He had compassion

Quite a difference from seeing people **as just fine** on their own...as people who have it all together...or at least think they do.

Quite a difference from seeing people as those who **need our judgment / condemnation.**
Welcomed sinners....

What's in our hearts actually matters.

You can **tell someone you have the mumps...**but if you have the **measles... guess what they will get.**

If we love people... what we say will convey it...if we don't...what we say won't.

We cease to be salesman and saleswoman.

When we pray... we are inviting God to make us more like Christ...to form Christ's compassion in us.

Richard Foster

"If we truly love people we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them...and this will lead us to prayer." - Richard Foster

2. Prayer connects us to the need for spiritual breakthrough.

The meaning of the Gospel... is that of good news...so we might feel **confused when the message about Jesus** isn't just heard as **good news.**

But Jesus knew that we have become **enslaved to the powers of this world.**

Jesus knew what he represented... and **what he was contending with.**

We need to do the same.

As we read in the Scriptures [3]...

2 Corinthians 4:4 (NLT)

Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

When I was about 19 ...in college... a young women back here at a local high school who was connected to the beach scene I was a part of...who had begun to engage Christian faith... and then expressed she was turning away from it...and I remember feeling mad...a bit at her...but with a clear sense that there was larger spiritual powers at work to try and keep hold of her. I was going away for a week of camping down the central coast...and decided to fast and pray for her...over the final three days. When I returned here...I went to the high school...she rushed out...telling me how she had had a breakthrough...and committed her life. Over forty years later...she still loves Jesus and is leading people to him.

It began with a holy frustration... a wanting to fight for someone.

I know that sometimes that will take time. And so the final point is this...

3. Prayer connects us to God's perseverance.

Praying for those who are **wandering**... who may be **antagonistic**... **can be challenging** ... some may know the heartache of **prodigal kids**. We may find we are in a **battle between hope** and **fear of disappointment**.

We may feel alone... 2 Peter 3:9 says,
2 Peter 3:9 (LSV)

The LORD is not slow in regard to the promise, as some count slowness, but is long-suffering to us, not intending any to be lost, but all to come to conversion.

God is not lacking intent...but is long-suffering... he is suffering with us in the state of the human heart.

Love is persevering...love does not write people off.

1 Corinthians 13:7 (NLT)

Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Praying with perseverance is a pure expression of love.

George Mueller... greatest examples of Christ... 19th century... in England... orphans...founded 117 schools for homeless children... came to provide for 120,000 children. (In 1844) He shared about being moved to pray for 5 particular men in his life...who were spiritually lost...prayed every day...18 months...then 5 yrs and the 2nd...another 6 yrs...at end of his life he said I have been praying for 52 yrs...said those last 2 had not come to faith...but I believe they will. After he died... 1898... both came to faith.
> Our prayers create effects that move outward.

Reminded of my friend Linus Morris.... Has led so many leaders across this nation and the world...to Jesus.

[Linus shares story of his wife's grandmother praying him into kingdom...and his wife doing so for every family member.]

Alternatives:

Jay Pathak video

Ex of Hudson Taylor.... Mother's prayer...Love never gives us

Closing:

We will have a couple great opportunities....

- Host a Holiday Party Challenge –
- Alpha Course – starting mid January

**When they wondered why Jesus was spending time with those who were such religious outsiders...he explained...that if a shepherd realizes they have returned the sheep to home...but one is missing...the leave the 99 to find the one.
And of course ... that is true whether one two or three.**

So who is the one in your life.

Begin to pray... for ourselves... those lives... parties and Alpha.
Set an alarm

Ministry for those who may sense they need to renew hope...

Responsive closing worship song: I Speak Jesus

Other songs potential:

The Blessing (Lyrics) ft. Kari Jobe & Cody Carnes

Keep Praying (feat. Doe Jones & Ryan Ofei) | Maverick City Music | TRIBL

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcMFcAlmWYc>

Resources: Praying for Unsaved Loved Ones By Lee Strobel - [here](#) / Transcript – [here](#)

Notes:

1. “When we fervently intercede on behalf of unbelievers with respect and thankfulness, we are identifying with God’s very interests and involvement in the salvation process. We are aligning ourselves with God’s purpose.” - Howard Tryon

2. Notably after noting Christ’s compassion, Jesus is calls his disciples to pray.

Matthew 9:36-38 (NLT)

36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 He said to his disciples, “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. 38 So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”

3. Notably, Paul goes on to state another valuable point, which is that people need God, not us.

2 Corinthians 4:4-7 (NLT)

4 Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don’t understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.

5 You see, we don’t go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord,

7 We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

See also: 2 Tim. 2:25-26; Eph. 2:2