

14. Transforming Lives Through Prayer

In our last six topics, we said that our goal, in developing a church structure, is to develop a structure that will transform the life and thinking of each person. We saw that was the goal of the early church, from the day that it began, in Acts 2. New believers continually began to meet in small groups to begin that life transformation. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” In Acts 2:41-47, we saw that those small groups focused on at least eight things. Those can be summarized by saying that those small groups were FLOCKS that were praying and praising. FLOCKS stands for:

F - fellowship

L - leadership development

O - outreach

C - caring

K - knowledge

S - service

Today, we will look at the Biblical principles that apply to help transform each person in the group and equip them to grow in their spiritual life through prayer. Many people have a background where they have said prayers but they have never learned how to pray. Christ often showed the disciples, by His example, the importance of prayer. Mark 1:35-36 says, “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him.” The disciples came to Christ and heard Him pray. This happened many times.

Luke 11:1 says, “Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’” As the disciples heard Christ pray many times, they began to really understand what it meant to talk to the Father, not just say prayers. As a result, they asked Christ to teach them to pray. We see that Christ used the opportunity to teach them many things about prayer. Such opportunities happen as we spend time together.

First, we see that Christ taught the disciples some key areas to include in their prayers. Luke 11:2-4 says, “So He said to them, ‘When you pray, say:’

- ‘Our Father in heaven’ - this recognizes our relationship to the Father
- ‘Hallowed be Your name’ – this recognizes the fact that God is holy
- ‘Your kingdom come’ – this is prayer for the work of God
- ‘Your will be done’ – this is prayer for the will of God
- ‘On earth as it is in heaven’
- ‘Give us day by day our daily bread’ – this is prayer for personal needs
- ‘And forgive us our sins’ - this is prayer for forgiveness
- ‘For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. – this shows a forgiving attitude
- ‘And do not lead us into temptation, - this is prayer for victory over temptation
- ‘But deliver us from the evil one’” – this is prayer for deliverance from Satan

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Here, we see that Christ did not just give them a prayer to repeat. Instead, Christ showed them some of the important areas to include in prayer. As we help new Christians learn how to pray, we also want to help them understand some of the areas they need to include as they learn to talk to the Father and have fellowship with Him.

However, Christ did not stop His instruction about prayer once He had taught them about key areas to include in prayer. Christ also taught them about the importance of continuing to pray, not giving up, when prayer is not answered immediately. Luke 11:5-8 says, “And He said to them, ‘Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him”; and he will answer from within and say, “Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you”? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.’” Christ shows that even a friend will respond if a person will keep making their request. We want to help new Christians realize that God will certainly answer our prayers as we continue to pray.

Christ went on to give three words that show prayer will be answered as people continue to pray with persistence. Those words are “ask”, “seek”, and “knock”. “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” Christ promised that those who continue to ask, and bring their requests to the Father, would have the Father give what they request in their prayers. Christ said those who seek an answer from the Father would receive an answer. Christ said those who knock would have the door opened to them.

Christ went on to give three illustrations of the fact that God is a loving Father who wants to do good to his children. Luke 11:11-13 says, “If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” An earthly father would not give a stone, instead of a piece of bread. An earthly father would not give a snake, instead of a fish. An earthly father would not give a scorpion, instead of an egg. That is true of earthly fathers, even though they still commit sin. Certainly, God, as our heavenly Father, will give His children what is needed when they ask.

In these verses, we also see that Christ promised that the Father would give the Holy Spirit. Christ explained more about the ways the Holy Spirit would transform lives, as He taught the disciples the night before He was crucified. John 14:16-17 says, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” In these verses, Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would be in us forever.

John 14:26 says, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” In this verse, Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would teach us. John 14:27 says, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” In this verse, Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would give us peace.

Then, Christ gave another promise about the Holy Spirit before He returned to heaven. Acts 1:8 says, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Luke 24:49 adds another statement that Christ gave earlier, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” The Holy Spirit is the One who gives Christians the power to change.

One of the greatest struggles that many Christians face is speaking the Word of God with boldness. The early church learned that God answered their prayer and the Holy Spirit gave them boldness to speak. Acts 4:29-31 says, “‘Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” Here, we see that the Christians prayed for boldness, and the Holy Spirit gave them boldness. This shows that the early Christians were learning to be transformed, by the Holy Spirit, as they learned to yield to Him, instead of depending on their own strength.

People who were fearful when they depended on their own strength became bold as they learned to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give them boldness. This was true even for those who were new or growing Christians. Acts 8:1 says the Christians, except the apostles, were scattered. Then, Acts 8:4 says, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” That is why new Christians need to be shown how to pray with persistence and ask the Father to transform their lives. The Father has given them the Holy Spirit. Christ said the Holy Spirit would give them understanding. Christ said the Holy Spirit would give them peace. Christ knew the Holy Spirit would give them boldness. The new Christians learned that God would answer their prayers.

We have been called to show those we lead how to have their lives transformed as they pray and yield their lives to the Lord. New, and growing, Christians will learn that the Lord transforms their lives as they ask Him for understanding, for peace, or for boldness to speak the Word of God. It is a great privilege to be an example and see the lives of Christians be transformed as they mature. May the Lord richly bless you as you help new and growing Christians learn to pray and yield their lives to the Father, so the Holy Spirit can work in their lives, and the love of Christ can flow through their lives.