

- I. Five Points, Point 1: "Prayers" Gee Sprague, Lead Pastor April 19, 2009
- A. At the first of the year, I shared a series of messages that cast the Vision of CrossRoad Church.
 - B. If you missed any of those messages, you can go to the website and download the notes and/or audio files, as well as view the video on the web.
 - C. Those messages also form a major part of the revised MAP curriculum. I just led the first group through it a few weeks ago, and they will be joining next week.
 - D. As I was considering the revision of MAP, I realized that there was an important element that we really were just sort of breezing through.
 - E. In the early days, I am not sure if there was any explanation given at all.
 - F. A few years ago, we began to include the Membership Vows in the MAP course, but there was very little explanation given.
 - G. When people join CrossRoad, you are committing to live your faith as a follower of Jesus Christ as a member of the local body of Christ, CrossRoad Church, through your Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service and a new one that our denomination has included which I think is important—Witness
 - H. Jacksonville is known for its Five Points. Just as 5 roads intersect to bring people together for commerce, these 5 points bring us together to form a healthy, growing body of Christ.
 - I. Prayer is the First Point
 - J. The Best Way To Pray
 - K. A priest, a Methodist minister and a Pentecostal Pastor were sitting around discussing the best positions for prayer, while a telephone repairman worked nearby. "Kneeling is definitely the best way to pray," the priest said. "No," said the minister. "I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched to Heaven." "You're both wrong," the Pentecostal Pastor said. "The most effective prayer position is lying down on the floor." The repairman could contain himself no longer. "Hey, fellas," he interrupted. "The best prayin' I ever did was when I was hangin' upside down from a telephone pole."
 - L. There is a lot of discussion about prayer, volumes have been written, more video teaching than could be watched in a lifetime.
 - M. I do think most of us learn to pray while hanging upside down from some pole.
 - N. Prayer is such a necessity for our growth as followers of Jesus Christ!
 - O. Jesus meant for His body to be a place where Prayer naturally flowed.
- II. **The Church was birthed in Prayer**
- A. It is no accident that Prayer is first.
 - B. When we look at the experience and practice of the first resurrection followers of Jesus, we find that they prayed before they did anything else.
 - C. The book of Acts chronicles the birth of the Church and the formation of those who were called to lead it and to spread the Good News about Jesus Christ.
 - D. *(Acts 1:13-14 NRSV) When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. {14} All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.*
 - E. Out of that prayer meeting came an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on these followers that was not only more evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus, but also an impartation of the power that had been limited to just His physical presence.
 - F. The disciples showed their devotion as followers of Jesus as they prayed.

G. As a result of that prayer meeting, and subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit, people gathered to hear more about Jesus and Peter, the disciple who had denied Jesus before the Crucifixion, now becomes an emboldened proclaimer of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, Savior of Humanity.

H. About three thousand people became followers of Jesus after his message. (*Acts 2:41 NRSV*) *So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.*

I. The church was birthed that day and immediately after that we are told, (*Acts 2:42 NRSV*) *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

III. Prayer is an expression of a follower's _____!

A. Closely associated with Prayer is **devotion**.

B. As you can see in each of the accounts in Acts, the disciples were described as devoting themselves to prayer.

C. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. *1 a: religious fervor : piety b: an act of prayer or private worship—usually used in plural c: a religious exercise or practice other than the regular corporate worship of a congregation.*

1. This is your own personal time of prayer.
2. It is a private, intimate type of worship.

D. *Webster's New World Dictionary defines Devote: to dedicate by vow. 1. To set apart for a special use or service. 2. To give up (onself or one's time, energy, etc.) to some purpose, activity or person.*

E. *Devotion: 1. The fact, quality, or state of being devoted 2. Piety, devoutness 3. Religious worship 4. Prayers, esp. as used in private 5. Loyalty or deep affection.*

F. The best kinds of relationships are those where commitment is based on Devotion.

1. If a person works a job just for a paycheck, it doesn't require devotion.
2. Most people who are in the ministry are doing their jobs because they are in love with Jesus.
3. The best marriages are the ones where commitment is based on devotion, not obligation.
4. Prayer for many is seen as an obligation, but the kind of prayers that birthed the church were based on love.
5. It takes that same kind of devoted prayer to empower a church!

G. *Celebration of Discipline / The Path to Spiritual Growth Richard J. Foster p. 33* Prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life. Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father... Real prayer is life creating and life changing.

To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ.

H. (*Psa 63:1 NRSV*) *O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

I. (*Mark 1:35 NRSV*) *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

J. *Too Busy Not To Pray Bill Hybels p. 9* "Prayer flies in the face of those deep-seated values. It is an assault on human autonomy, an indictment of independent living. To people in the fast lane, determined to make it on their own, prayer is an embarrassing interruption."

K. *Too Busy Not To Pray Bill Hybels p. 11* "The greatest thrill has been the qualitative difference in my relationship with God."

L. This is the kind of Prayer to which we are devoted. Not impersonal, rigid, structured prayer; but relational, life giving, Jesus seeking prayer.

IV. Faith not Futility

- A. I think many people do not pray because their world view is Futile, Hopeless.
- B. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have a world view of Hope, not fatalism. Prayer is our exercise in Faith that overcomes Futility!
- C. Richard Foster, In our efforts to pray it is easy for us to be defeated right at the outset because we have been taught that everything in the universe is already set, and so things cannot be changed. And if things cannot be changed, why pray? We may gloomily feel this way, but the Bible does not teach that. The Bible pray-ers prayed as if their prayers could and would make an objective difference. The apostle Paul gladly announces that we are "co-laborers with God"; that is, we are working with God to determine the outcome of events (*1 Cor 3:9 NASB*) *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.*). It is Stoicism that demands a closed universe, not the Bible.
- D. *Changing Church C. Peter Wagner* p. 156 Quote from John Sanders: "Our prayers can have an effect on God's plans. It makes no sense to say God grieves, changes his mind, and is influenced by our prayers, and also claim that God tightly controls everything so that everything that occurs is what God desired to happen!"
- E. (*Luke 18:3-8 NRSV*) *In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' {4} For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, {5} yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.' {6} And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. {7} And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? {8} I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"*

V. Prayer leaves the decision up to God!

- A. There are things that can change, and some things that will not change unless we pray. We all have stories of unanswered prayer, but only in heaven will we see all the prayers that were answered, and shamefully we will also see all the things that God was waiting on for someone to pray.
- B. *Too Busy Not To Pray Bill Hybels* p. 88-89 Unanswered prayer: "If the request is wrong, God says, "No." If the timing is wrong, God says, "Slow." If you are wrong, God says, "Grow." But if the request is right, the timing is right and you are right, God says, "Go!"" Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36; Matthew 20:20-23; Mark 10:35-40; Luke 9:51-56
- C. *Too Busy Not To Pray Bill Hybels* p. 92 "Before bringing a request to the Lord, it's a good idea to ask: If God granted this request, would it bring glory to him? Would it advance his kingdom? Would it help people? Would it help me to grow spiritually?"

VI. Prayer aligns our will with God's Will!

- A. *Experiencing God Day-by-Day The Devotional and Journal Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby* p. 257 Acts 2:1 "Prayer is designed to adjust you to God's will, not to adjust God to your will."
- B. We make the Will of God out to be some huge, unattainable burden on our lives.
- C. There are people like Jesus' Disciples, the apostle Paul, in modern days Billy Graham or Mother Theresa that it does seem that God had a specific type of plan for their lives.
- D. It does seem that there are people that God destined to do certain things, and we are certainly glad they got aligned with God's will.
- E. There are, however, certain things that all followers of Jesus Christ must align themselves and through prayer we set our lives on course with Jesus.
1. Bill Hybels p. 179 "What is God's will?
 - a. "That we believe in his love and power.
 - b. "That we come to him in sincerity and trust.

- c. "That we clear away barriers between us, including preoccupation and excessive busyness.
- d. "That we listen for his still, small voice and obey it when we hear it.
- e. "That we live in his presence and enjoy him forever.
- f. "Prayer is the way to turn dry theological descriptions into warm, living, personal realities."

VII. Prayer builds a relationship.

A. Anyone who is married knows that the top three things to build a healthy marriage are:

1. *Communication*
2. *Communication*
3. *Communication*

B. Guess what the top problem in all relationships is.

1. *Poor Communication*

C. The more time you spend communicating with Jesus, the more you begin to act like him.

D. You cannot sustain a personal relationship with Jesus Christ without Prayer.

VIII. CrossRoad Prayer

A. Today I have just wanted to remind you of the basic nature of prayer, and its importance in your faith.

B. I also wanted to let you know of opportunities for you to grow in Prayer and to become involved in Prayer.

C. If you are looking to grow, the best prayer to use is the model Jesus gave His disciples.

1. Take out the card in your program.
2. That Prayer is printed on your card.
3. On the Website you can download the notes and audio of a Message Series that I did last year.

D. On the other side of the card are some areas where you can begin to Support CrossRoad by your Prayers.

1. Pastors and Staff
2. Ministries of CrossRoad
3. Volunteers, those who serve you and with whom you serve.
 - a. If you are on a serving team, I would encourage you to regularly pray for those team members with whom you serve.
4. Pray:
 - a. That God would use us to make a difference in the life of our community.
 - b. For the health of our Church Family: Spiritually, Physically and Emotionally.

E. We meet for prayer every Sunday morning at 7:30 a.m. to pray for the Worship Service.

F. People are praying in the praying room every Sunday at both Services.

G. Every Monday our Staff meets and begins our week to Pray for the requests that you make each Sunday.

H. Through the website you can subscribe to our Prayernet that sends out a daily list of Pastors, Staff, and Leaders; Teachers in our schools, Missions we support, United Methodist Pastors in Northeast Florida, and Government leaders, National, State and Local.

I. This list also sends prayer requests from people mostly within CrossRoad who are facing some time of crisis.

J. The course Experiencing God, though not necessarily a course on Prayer, is a great course to learn about God's Will and how to know Him through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

K.The greatest place to grow in Prayer is in a small group. So if you are finding yourself at a place where you either don't know how to grow or are at a plateau, participating in a small group will keep you moving up.

IX. Conclusion

A.Close with Lord's Prayer

B.Our Father who art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy Name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have
forgiven our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.

Amen