

**Pray for others...and be like Jesus
John 17:20-26, Phil 2:5-8**

Friends, when I was a young boy I used to read Danny Orlis adventure books.

And Danny's adventures in these books had him facing mystery, intrigue and dangerous situations – but using his skills, quick thinking, and relying on his faith and Christian morals – he always managed to come out ok in the end and help solve whatever mystery he had become involved in.

But what has always stuck with me from those stories was that there was always one character – who, at the beginning of the story was surly, angry, bitter, and didn't believe in Jesus – but by the end of the story they had undergone some sort of transformation and become a Christian.

So from a very early age I got used to the idea that Jesus changes people's lives and turns things around for them – and I came to believe that people had the potential to be more than what they already were.

And it wasn't just something I read about - I saw this happen in the lives of people in my Dad's church as well.

One of the most dramatic examples occurred in the life of a particular fellow I'll call Steve whose wife had reached out to connect with the church because their marriage was on the rocks.

Steve had a problem with alcohol and it was affecting his work and his relationships and I can remember when I first met them Steve's work wasn't going well, finances weren't going well, He and his wife had separated, and when I saw him you could see his countenance was dark, foreboding, angry...

Now the transformation didn't happen overnight, but a few years later after Steve encountered Christ – he became a different person and you could tell even just by looking at his face – the darkness and anger, it's all gone.

His marriage was restored, he was able to start up an innovative building company, his family is doing well and he has a very close walk with Jesus Christ.

And I've experienced transformation in my own life as well.

If you met me when I was a teenager... there's no way you would have said "that boy is going to become a minister" or even "that boy is going to be a responsible, intelligent, articulate adult someday"

But, Jesus' relationship with me has caused some significant changes and growth in my life which is responsible for me being who I am today.

And all of this causes me to believe that people can become more than what they already are – that Christ can bring about transformation in people's lives so that;

A nominal church attender suddenly becomes enthusiastic and starts to participate more in the life and work of the church and eventually becomes a spiritual leader...

Or, one someone from our community who has politely resisted the message of Jesus is suddenly able to believe and confess that Christ is the way the truth and life...

And friends I believe this kind of change is possible – and so I have this "vision" when I see people - of who, and what they could become for Christ.

And so friends I confess I have these kinds of visions for us and for our surrounding community as well.

I can imagine how the people we know in our Community could be changed, how they would go from having no faith to trusting in Jesus and worshiping and serving him... and the impact these highly educated professionals and civic leaders could have on the city of Calgary and in God's Kingdom.

I can imagine that worship at Valleyview could be packed on Sunday mornings because people have been changed and so their priorities change...

I can imagine that we have enough elders to lead and grow all our ministry teams because people have matured into spiritual leaders...

I can imagine that our ministry teams are full of people who have discovered their gifts and are using them to minister because people have discovered what they can do since they've experience the grace of Christ's forgiveness...

And I can imagine how our budget would be in surplus, how we could be developing new ministry initiatives, how everyone in the congregation would be part of a Christ Care group...

I can imagine it – I can see it, even though that's not the way things are at the moment, because friends I believe transformation is possible, I know transformation is possible.

But... six years of working for this kind of revolutionary transformation in our congregation and community has driven home the reality to me that it only comes about with prayer as the starting point, and specifically prayer that targets the real barriers to this transformation taking place.

I mean we pray generic prayers that God will bless our church and help us to grow – but that won't bring about transformation friends.

Because for transformation to take place, specific obstacles need to be removed by the Holy Spirit – so we need to engage in intercessory prayer that co-operates with the Holy Spirit to targets those specific obstacles.

And so to equip us for this kind of prayer we're looking at John 17, where we find Jesus doing some intercessory prayer of his own – with some pretty specific targets which I want you to see.

So, what do we see Jesus targeting here in this prayer?

Well Jesus is particularly concerned that the world understands and believes that He is one whom God has sent, in fact he repeats this three times.

Why is it so important that the world know and believe that God has sent him? Because humans are spiritual beings and they are looking for a way to reconnect with God.

Just look at all the religions and spiritual practices in this “world”, not to mention things the people do to try and find meaning and satisfaction in life and its obvious people are searching to connect with something of ultimate significant.

Unfortunately because of our rebellion, humans can only connect with God if God himself provides a way.

Thus it is imperative that people know and believe that God sent Jesus, that He is the way , because Jesus is the one who reconciles us to God, because He is both fully human and fully God, he is the perfect mediator.

Now a mediator is someone who steps in between two parties who are in conflict and goes back and forth representing one to the other to bring to bring about reconciliation. This is how a mediator intercedes.

So if we are going to pray for others, to intercede for them – our understanding of Jesus Christ as THE mediator must be our starting point.

Because of the intercessory work Jesus did for us, we are enabled to intercede for others.

We can and should come before God for other people because of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done – which is really another aspect of praying in Jesus name...

And this makes all the difference in our attitude towards others – without having experienced Jesus interceding for us, if we do not base our intercession on Jesus’ intercession..

then we will come across towards others as proud, self-righteous and judgmental to those whom we are praying for, and that's counterproductive.

Instead we need to put into practice what Paul writes about in Philippians 2:5-8, and basing our intercessory prayer on Christ's example enables us to do that.

And if our intercessory prayer is based on Jesus then when we pray we should also imitate Jesus and go to be amongst those who we are praying for.

As Paul says in Philippians 2:7 Christ took on the nature of a servant and became human... and John 1:14 says "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*"

I mean it's a start that our church building is physically located in our community, it's a start that you and I live in our community... but it's still possible for us not to **be among** those we are praying for

Dwelling among people means interacting, getting to know them, finding out their hopes and dreams, their fears and concerns, what they value or dislike, what they believe and what they need.

This is a big part of why we allow community groups and other organizations to use our facilities during the week.

It's part of how we can to build relationships with people outside of our congregation and provides opportunities to share the gospel.

But without intercessory prayer to lay the ground work for this activity - those we dwell amongst will not be receptive or interested in hearing what we have to share with them.

Someone once said "Prayer is the real work... Evangelism is just mopping up"

Friends if we want our friends and neighbors, and the people who come through this building during the week to respond

the message of Jesus Christ we need to intercede for them specifically –by name – just as Jesus specifically interceded for “*all those who would believe in him*”

So, intercessory prayer is based on Jesus, but it is also “about” Jesus. What do I mean by this?

Well, as Jesus prays for “*all those who will believe in Him,*” He asks His Father that;

i) they might be one, ii) they might be unified iii) that they would be in God iv) and that they could be with him and see his glory.

Interesting requests... what with all the daily needs of the people around him, and with all that was going on in society and the world at that point and time in history.

We might expect Jesus to be more practical, or political, or concerned about social justice as he is interceding for people.

Couldn't he have prayed for peace, or hunger or political freedom? What about the 99%?

Instead we see Jesus praying for people in the future... who have yet to believe in Him and requesting that they become unified and connected to God – what kind of practical make a difference faith is this?

So friends - when we intercede for others it is tempting to limit our prayers to practical sorts of things, things which they have asked us to pray for, or the needs which are really obvious. eg. a friend who is sick, someone who needs a job, etc...

We certainly we can and should bring these things up in prayer – in fact we had a whole sermon on that...

But ***Intercessory prayer*** is more about getting at the primary need, the root need which all of us have - to know Jesus as the means by which our sin is removed and we become reconciled to God.

Intercessory prayer is asking God to work this revelation in people's lives even if they don't think they need it or want it.

Intercessory prayer is "about Jesus" because it comes from a conviction that everyone needs to have faith in Jesus so that they can get past their sin and truly know God.

It recognizes this is the greatest human need which needs to be dealt with first and then other needs can be prayed for.

And finally friends, Intercessory prayer is also about asking God to remove specific obstacles so that people are transformed into the men and woman God intends for them to become.

And in his prayer Jesus specifically targets the obstacles of unbelief, separation, ignorance and spiritual blindness that would stand in the way of the people being transformed to become part of His Body – the church in the future.

Friends, when you look around at your school, at work, your family and friends, your community - can you envision how it would be if these people started to believe in Jesus?

Or can you imagine what things might be like if your fellow Christians experienced further transformation in their lives?

Friends, God can make amazing things happen to ordinary people and Jesus knew this – look at who He chose for his disciples!

They were ordinary everyday unschooled fisherman - but Jesus had a vision for who they could become and interceded for them, asking God to bring it about – and God did.

We are here today as followers of Jesus Christ because the disciples were transformed into Apostles when they received the Holy Spirit.

Friends, we also need to believe that the people we know and interact with can come to believe in Christ... that they can become followers of Jesus, and be transformed...

And we need to believe that our fellow Christians, and ourselves, can grow beyond where we are at in our faith...

That God always has more to do in us and through us – until that day when Christ returns and all things are made new.

So friends, we need to intentionally start asking God to bring this transformation in our lives and in the lives other people around us... through intercessory prayer.

And we need to specifically start targeting those things which are standing in the way of this transformation.

So let me ask you...what do you see working against those people for whom Jesus asked to be added to His body?

What is keeping “ALL those who would believe” from believing?

Again, this is another reason why we need to be dwelling among, hanging out, and getting to know those whom we are interceding for – because if we are not – how will we know what is specifically blocking their transformation?

Is it unbelief – a refusal to believe that Jesus is sent from God?

Is it false teaching – a miss-belief that God will accept you because you’ve basically been a good person, or that whatever path you follow will connect you with God as long as you try hard?

Is it idolatry – allowing good things to become god things.

When work, sports, family, education, etc... replace the disciplines of prayer, worship, and scripture reading and serving and giving that we need to practice to help keep God at the center of our lives.

Is it the Devil – tempting people with the lure of fame, wealth, power if they play his game?

Whatever it is that you see working against people becoming part of Christ's body you can step in and pray against it. And friends, other people need you to do this for them... because they are unable to do it themselves.

Someone who is fine with his own beliefs or someone else's false teaching will not ask God for the truth – right?

Someone who is trapped in the busyness of idolatry will not be able to slow down to see the foolishness of building their life without God at the center.

But you can intercede for them. You can pray to God for those particular people He has put in your life.

You can ask God to take away their unbelief, expose the false teachings; and have them see the foolishness of idolatry, and

to protect them from Satan's temptations by interceding against these things in prayer.

And friends, in doing this you are co-operating with the Holy Spirit to help bring about transformation in people's lives so that they can become more than what they already are, so that they can become the men and women God intends them to be!

Friends – our calling as Christians to go and make disciples of all nations, our mission to reach out to our surrounding community and share the message of Jesus Christ in our words and deeds – has to start with intercessory prayer!

That's where the real work is... it always has been and friends if we are serious about reaching out to our surrounding community – then we need to be willing to “pray the price”

What does that mean? Friends let me close with an example of “praying the price...”

Pastor Paul Yonggi Cho of the Korean Full Gospel Church was once asked by a local pastor why was it that Cho's church had a membership of 750,000 while his was only 3,000? The local pastor was better educated, preached better sermons and even had a foreign wife?

Cho enquired, "How much do you pray? The pastor said "Thirty minutes a day." To which Cho replied, "There is your answer. I pray three to five hours per day."

Praying the price friends is how much time and energy we are willing to spend interceding in prayer, co-operating with the Holy Spirit to bring about transformation in people lives.

The good news is that it has started here at Valleyview - we've started to pray the price and we're beginning to see God working in us, transforming us into the Church He has desired for us to become...

We've gone from simply surviving to healthy and thriving... our deficit is shrinking, our worship attendance is increasing,

our Christ Care groups are growing, and new people are joining us... and our intercessory prayer group continues to meet and pray.

So friends – imagine what more God can do as we continue to pray the price!

Friend I want to encourage you to join in with our prayer team, adding your prayers of intercession to theirs, praying specifically for the continued transformation of our church and community... adding your prayers to the prayer of our Lord Jesus – who prayed “for all who will believe” in him.

You can do this by coming out on Tue nights - and you can pray at home or pray with us here, or join me for my monthly prayer drive through our community – However you do it, just pray.

Friends- pray for others, and become like Christ – Amen.