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Prayerful Dependence

*I love the LORD because He has heard my appeal
for mercy. Because He has turned His ear to me,
I will call out to Him as long as I live.*

(Psalm 116:1-2)

BY THE NUMBERS

Seeing people praying together is a normal sight at our church. (73 percent strongly or moderately agree)

Story of Success

“A lady, who was sick and wanted prayer, came to the altar. Her five-year-old daughter was with her. They were waiting for the pastor to pray for them. But before the pastor could get there the little girl put her hand on her mother and said, ‘Lord, heal my mommy.’ You want prayer to be something that’s a powerful expression of faith and belief that God can touch those around you. Then prayer becomes a pleasure and something the body wants to do.” —Robert Smith, Centenary Assembly of God, Luverne, Alabama

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS SPEAK . . .

“I have discovered an astonishing truth. God is attracted to weakness. He can’t resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need him.”¹ —Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*

God’s Invitation to Tabernacle Baptist

In 1986 Tabernacle Baptist Church, Lake City, Florida, was in the process of closing its doors for good. Earnest money (\$5,000) had already been given by a local businessman to purchase the facility. His plans for the building: to become a diesel mechanic shop. Mike Norman became the new pastor of a church with a deteriorating facility and a heartbeat away from death. The first five years were a struggle to the point that Mike and his wife had given up.

A Sunday night discussion of real revival led to a person volunteering his home for a prayer meeting the next night. A second person volunteered to host a Tuesday night prayer meeting. God moved in the lives of people in incredible ways. The first Monday night a young girl received Christ. Every night people would begin their story with the words “You are not going to believe what God did.” Numerous stories of salvation, financial provision, and physical healing emerged from the meetings. Nightly prayer meetings started at seven and ran as late as ten each night.

The revival moved to Sunday mornings. Pastor Mike Norman kept a journal over eighteen months. During this period attendance and offerings tripled. Services ran as late as one in the afternoon. “We would start congregational singing, and folks would get up and just come to the altar,” said Pastor Norman. “We had people saved during the singing. I just led the traffic; that’s what I did.” *Prayer is the engine of Transformational Churches.*

Discovering Prayer in the Transformational Church

A prayerful dependence is evident in Transformational Churches. These churches are humbly dependent on God for the vitality of the church. Prayer is not a program, and in many cases a weekly prayer meeting is not offered. Yet prayer undergirds everything a Transformational Church does. Researchers referred to prayer as the engine to the churches we identified as transformational. It sustains their worship. It is evident in their community (their relationships). Prayer fuels their missional engagement.

Prayer has always held a significant role in the church. This is especially true of times the church is in the midst of revitalization or revival.

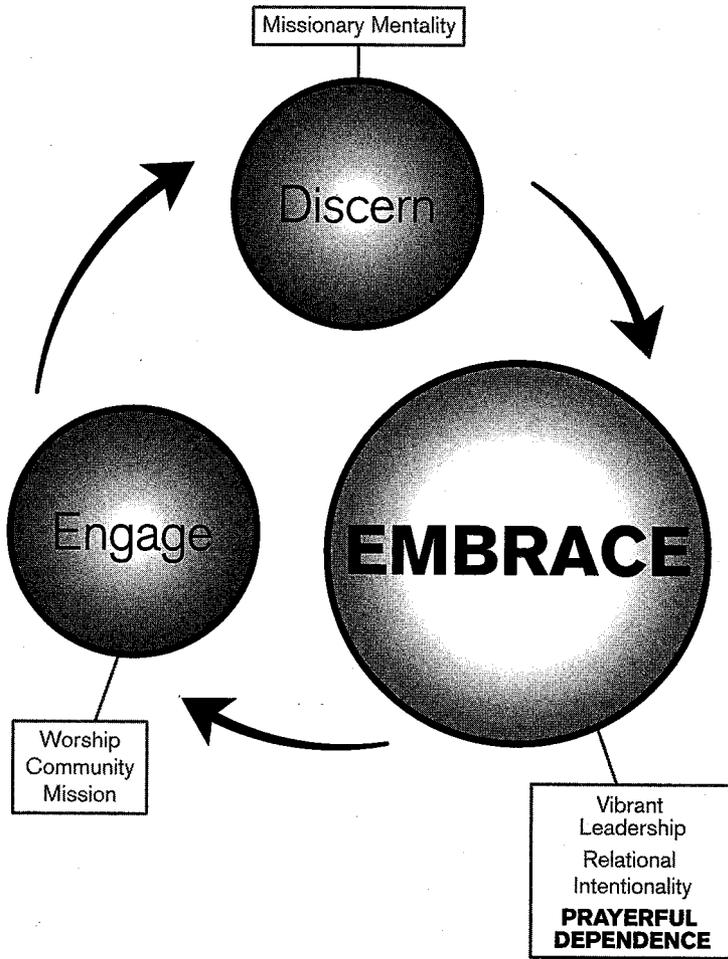
Iain Murray wrote,

What happens in revivals is not to be seen as something miraculously different from the regular experience of the church. The difference lies in degree not kind. In an outpouring of the Spirit, spiritual influence is more wide spread, convictions are deeper and feelings more intense. But all this is only a highlighting of normal Christianity.²

Prayer is not something that suddenly appears in a church because it begins to show transformational practices. The vast majority of churches we surveyed valued prayer. But the level, type, and expectancy about prayer in TCs was simply different. Similar to Murray's observance about experiences in the church, prayer in TCs is greater in amount and intensity.

God's intent is that believers—both individually and collectively—remain in close communication with Him. It is the reason He gave us prayer. We would define prayer simply as the volitional response of a person to listen and speak to God about His work and character. In order to see transformation occur in a person, church, or community, God must be involved. God must be invited into the story. Prayer is our link to receive understanding from God about His Word and move forward in obedience to His mission.

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Transformational Loop

Transformation Findings

Conducting a survey on prayer is difficult. First we are faced with measuring the “effectiveness” or “success” of prayer as an activity. Quite frankly, we are reluctant to attempt such a measure. Prayer is a response to God’s work rather than a fulcrum to move Him to action. Therefore, as we asked questions, we were faced with more qualitative answers (experiential) rather quantifiable measures (numerical).

TCs responded that prayer is a commonplace activity of the church. Other churches showed a penchant for organized prayer gatherings that are sparsely attended. For example, we asked for agreement or disagreement on this statement:

- “Moments of spontaneous prayer in worship services, groups, or classes are normal within the life of our church.” (58 percent strongly or moderately agree)

Through the stories and the surveys, we found that prayer in a TC happens naturally out of the community of believers. It is done with expectancy rather than out of repetitive behavior.

Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Fort Collins, Colorado, experiences worship services with different types of prayer woven throughout. Pastor John Terpstra includes a prayer of adoration in each service “invoking the holiness, greatness, and awesomeness of God.” A prayer of confession is included that can be in unison or led by someone. Specific times of intercession and even hearing requests are included. Also, prayer teams are available for people after the service where people can follow up with prayer concerns.

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The work of prayer is central in a TC worship service. Once again we witnessed the convergence of the Transformational Loop elements when surveying prayer in the churches. In these places members know that prayer is the regular practice rather than an interruption to the norm. Through prayer they believe God will change lives.

Another discovery about prayer in TCs is its link to service.

- “Those who serve in our church spend time in prayer before serving together.” (79 percent strongly or moderately agree)

TCs are intensely concerned with witnessing life change. To that end they refuse to rely on human ingenuity. With that being said, many of the TCs from our study are leaders in innovative and contextualized ministry.

But they know that only with God's work among them will individual and societal transformation take place.

A common story line would go like this: Mary coordinates greeters for this Sunday for her church. In the days leading up to Sunday, she calls all of those volunteering to welcome guests and members and asks them

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to arrive a few minutes early. When they do, they know they are coming to pray. Why do they know this? Because they always pray before people begin arriving to worship and Bible study. Why do they do this? In anticipation that God's presence, His work, and redemptive power will be palpable to everyone who walks through the doors. They pray for one another to be filled with God's Spirit and for the ministries of the church to reach beyond the campus on Sundays.

And they gather to pray without a mandate from the pastors, elders, or church council. They pray together before serving because it is the natural order of things in their church.

We spend profuse amounts of time speaking to churches across the country and have discovered a sad reality. Too many churches trust in their stuff and not their Savior. On the other hand, TCs pray before they serve because they want God to work through them and never in spite of them. They trust their Savior rather than their stuff.

One of the other measures for prayer is how often it is observed occurring by other parties. We looked for the perception of its frequency in churches.

- "Seeing people praying together is a normal sight at our church."
(73 percent strongly or moderately agree)

Perhaps this is the discovery from the Transformational Church survey that best shows the difference between TCs and other churches. It is a good place to ask a tough question: "How common is spontaneous prayer in your church?" In a TC, prayer happens out of a history of what has been

seen as its result. People pray in TCs because they have seen prayer bring about transformation.

What Makes Jesus Angry?

For some people the picture of an angry Jesus is uncomfortable. Jesus, holding a lamb, praying in a garden, or having a child on His lap is much easier to envision. In light of the holiness of God and the compassion of Christ, we can be assured heaven cares about the details on earth. God is not passive or soft. When people suffer or sin, heaven is grieved. God is engaging the world through His Son Jesus even as you read this paragraph.

Jesus displayed emotion in His earthly life. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35). Jesus felt compassion for harassed and helpless people (Matt. 9:36). And on at least two occasions Jesus showed anger. So what can we learn from Scripture about the anger of Jesus?

If you did not know much about Jesus, you might assume what would make Him angry. People who cheat people out of their money would be a safe assumption. He has to be really angry at Barney Madoff, right? Madoff is the former NASDAQ chairman currently serving a 150-year prison sentence for defrauding people of billions of dollars. Yet the Bible recorded Jesus' relationships with tax collectors, who in those times were known cheats.

Surely the prostitutes and others who were sexually immoral made Jesus' blood boil. From the brothels in Las Vegas to the multibillion-dollar porn industry, Jesus has to be pretty annoyed by it all. Yet we have no record of anything but love, hope, and forgiveness when He came in contact with a woman caught in adultery or another woman with a history of immoral relationships He met at a well.

A closer look at the two anger episodes in the Bible sheds light on things that make Jesus angry.

First, Jesus' anger is directed toward religious people. Conventional wisdom would assume religious people would be among Jesus' favorites. They are

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the lifeblood of spiritual movement. Think about it. Religious people think and talk about God a lot. They also have a lot of public meetings in honor of God. Donations to God's work flow from religious people. Oftentimes religious people are quick to defend what they think is in God's best interests. The entire religious operation should be in good shape as long as there are plenty of religious people to keep the machinery operating. Not so fast. Often in Scripture Jesus was direct and outspoken about the misbehavior of religious people. In essence, the misbehavior of the religious was terrible for business. At least twice their misbehavior triggered Jesus' anger.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus met a man in the temple who had a withered hand. He was disturbed by what He knew the religious people were thinking. The religious people for technical reasons thought Jesus should ignore the man with the withered hand. The story told how Jesus responded, "After looking around at them with anger and sorrow at the hardness of their hearts, He told the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' So he stretched it out, and his hand was restored" (Mark 3:5). Jesus was angry at the hard hearts of the religious and sorrowful for their lack of compassion.

The second anger episode is told in all four Gospels. All of these accounts confirmed public expressions of anger from Jesus. Matthew's account in 21:12-13 is one example: "Jesus went into the temple complex and drove out all those buying and selling in the temple. He overturned the money changers' tables and the chairs of those selling doves. And He said to them, 'It is written, My house will be called a house of prayer. But you are making it a den of thieves!'" John's Gospel adds the word "zeal" to describe Jesus' response: "After making a whip out of cords, He drove everyone out of the temple complex with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers' coins and overturned the tables. He told those who were selling doves 'Get these things out of here! Stop turning My Father's house into a marketplace!' And His disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for Your house will consume Me" (John 2:15-17). The word *zeal* means "fierceness of indignation" or "fervor of spirit."

So did Jesus lose control? Absolutely not. The Bible teaches that anger and sin are not necessarily the same. Anger can cross a line as it does most

of the time with us. Then anger becomes sin. Paul was clear in his letter to the Ephesians: “Be angry and do not sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, and don’t give the Devil an opportunity” (Eph. 4:26–27). Jesus is angry when we use His assembly for anything other than His intended purpose. Specifically He is angry when prayer is replaced by earthly activities. Jesus expects His people to practice praying and encourage others to do the same.

Jesus expects His people to practice praying and encourage others to do the same.

If your vision for people is personal transformation, this will be seen in the practice of praying. Strategies, excellence, methods, or even commitment cannot substitute for humble dependence on God. If our motivation is numerical growth, then we have no real reason to pray. Organizational expansion principles will produce results relative to your community or “market.” Teamwork, communication, people skills, and quality control will produce results. But none of these things will produce substantive results from God in the lives of people. Organization growth in the name of God will not save a marriage. Organizational growth will not free people from life-destroying habits. Organizational growth is a low bar. Transformation is His work. We cannot rely on ourselves and see transformation. It is impossible for us to affect life change in others. The temple was filled with people and activity. Yet Jesus was angry over what He saw. He did not see people engaging the Father in relationship.

Wayne Cordeiro is the founding pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship in Honolulu, Hawaii. He has helped plant eighty-three churches through the ministry of New Hope in the Pacific Rim. In addressing our issue of self-dependence, he says:

We don’t know what God knows. The sooner we accept this, the better off we’ll be . . . We rashly take matters into our own hands. We maneuver and manipulate to get what we want. We know it’s not really the best, yet we’ll show people the results and say, “Look what God gave me!”³

Prayer Priorities of Christ

As we embrace life with Jesus, we embrace His priorities. As we embrace His priorities, they will become our practices. Jesus demonstrated His passion for the proper priorities in His local assembly. Three priorities of Jesus are clearly violated in the scene at the temple.

1. *The proper use of His house.* When Christians assemble, they should pray. No matter the model or age of the church, prayer is a nonnegotiable. The earliest church included prayer in their daily routine (Acts 2:42). People should be called to pray in groups and as individuals when they gather. Invitations and opportunities to pray should be made in smaller groups as well as in the large assembly. Nothing is more important than God's people praying. Jesus said so.

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TCs see prayer as a critical part of changing their community. We learned in our study that prayer walking in the community was common. Churches offered prayer for people outside their church through various means. Prayer for educators, politicians, policemen, firemen, and other community leaders was practiced. Prayer groups, prayer vigils, prayer rooms, and prayer events happened consistently in Transformational Churches.

Notice the transformational influence prayer had on God's restoration of people and places. God was responding to the prayer of Solomon in 2 Chronicles. Solomon was praying a long dedication prayer for a newly completed temple for God. The building was amazing to behold (2 Chron. 3-4) and built to display the glory of God. For almost two chapters Solomon prayed for the presence and blessing of God on the building set aside for His purposes. The prayer included the request that God's eyes and ears be open to the prayers of His servants. God's answer to Solomon's prayer was immediate in the form of a challenge and a promise. God said, "And My people who are called by My name humble themselves, pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).

Notice healing did not stop with the individual who needed a fresh touch from God. When God touches His people, the ramifications are far-reaching. God promised He would heal their land. In the historical context of 2 Chronicles the “land” was not producing crops. God’s people experienced His discipline because of their selfish, anti-God behavior. Yet, in principle, the same issue is being lived out in cities and communities throughout North America. Personal sin can have a public effect.

The solution begins from inside the church with the changing of God’s people. When they change, He begins to use them to change the community, the “land.” Seeking God’s face and praying are significant steps in seeing transformation in your city. Pray for God to do transformational work on His people first.

2. *The accessibility of “all people” to a relationship with Him.* Prayer gives all people access to God. The wonderful plan of God was presented by Paul, “But as it is written: What no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and what has never come into a man’s heart, is what God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

The priest or preacher has no more access to God than the child who believes in Christ. People who pray enter into God’s presence. No matter what tongue, tribe, or nation is represented, people are special to Him. God desires relational conversations with all people.

Religious people in the temple episode enraged Jesus because they were blocking the space reserved for Gentiles to pray. The result was the temple became an exclusive place for a few “chosen” ones to enjoy God. The desire of God, before the foundation of the world that He “so loved,” was for all peoples to know and experience Him.

How assuring are the words of God for all people groups! Jesus made reference to the Isaiah passage in Matthew that described the purpose of “His house.” “And the foreigners who convert to the LORD, minister to Him, love the LORD’s name, and are His servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it, and who hold firmly to My covenant—I will bring them to My holy mountain and let them rejoice in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar, for My

house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56:6–7). Jesus was angry because prayer was relegated to a low/no priority position, particularly for those who were not “insiders.”

TCs are places where prayer is taught as the way for everyone to connect with the one true God. Prayer is a priority because connecting with God is more important than connecting to programs.

3. *The response to His praying people.* Why is prayer important for His people to engage? Why is prayer the purpose of His house? Because prayer is a relationship and conversation with God. Jesus invites people to invite Him into their lives and circumstances through praying. Jesus gives people the resource and capability to affect the lives of other people. People who pray enjoy a deeper level of partnership with God to change the world because they take time to follow His leadership.

James described the significance of prayer, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours; yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land. Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit” (James 5:16–18). Prayer is significant because prayer is powerful. Its power is found in the God to whom we pray. His desire for us is to invite Him into events of our lives so we can be a partner with the King. The Lord wants to involve us in His divine work.

Praying in His will with the right heart will make a difference in the affairs of the world.

Do you ever wonder why God would invite us to pray? Isn’t God going to do what God is going to do? In certain matters, yes, God is going to do what God is going to do. But the mystery of prayer alongside the sovereignty of God is the reassurance in this passage (and many others) that ascribe power and results in praying. God has chosen prayer to be a vehicle by which He changes people and the world. Praying in His will with the right heart will make a difference in the affairs of the world.

TCs have watched lives change after they prayed. From prayer in the past, they received leadership from the Spirit for their church. They pray expectantly that God will continue to respond to their requests for guidance, empowerment, and change in their community.

Transformational Prayer Practices

TCs in our study valued and practiced prayer. They embraced the values of Jesus. Different methods and traditions influence the act of praying in Transformational Churches. What does a church deeply committed to prayer look like? Certain principles were consistent and valuable to consider.

1. Praying churches experience breakthroughs. Churches with transformational practices varied in size, location, methods, and denomination. But churches that experienced any type of breakthrough or turnaround highlighted prayer in their story. “Pastors and churches have to get uncomfortable enough to say, ‘We are not New Testament Christians if we don’t have a prayer life.’ This conviction makes us squirm a little, but how else will there be a breakthrough with God.”⁴

For many churches prayer has been and will be the place of a cathartic experience. The recognition that many members regard prayer as unimportant will cause leaders and/or the members to feel conviction. It might even cause sorrow and anger, as in the life of Jesus. No matter the emotional reaction, acknowledging the lack of prayerful dependence may well become the cathartic experience necessary for a church to enter the Transformational Loop.

Pastor Randall Smith of Vista Hills Church, El Paso, Texas, experienced a breakthrough initiated through prayer. Prayer teams began praying every night at the church facility. Prayers were focused on preparing people for the coming of Jesus. They were not necessarily looking toward the end of the age. The question that informed their praying was, “What would it look like for people to be prepared for God to move into the midst of their church in whatever fashion He chose?” For three years and counting the

people of Vista Hills Church have met and prayed every day for at least an hour. They pray for church leaders, direction of the church, and families in the church.

Pastor Smith believes the result of praying has been transformational. The entire culture of the church has been changed. The prayer for preparation to Pastor Smith meant that God would change them into “people like David, after God’s own heart, a people that could hear the Lord and respond quickly, people who would be faithful to the Lord, . . . and He has answered that prayer.” Vista Hills Church has become a church that prays through every detail of their organization. Church positions are filled through prayer. Pastor Smith goes to his prayer team with every dilemma and concern he faces. “The prayer team is the end,” said Pastor Smith, “If this is a giant ship, . . . that prayer team is the engine room. It is everything.”

Christ United Methodist Church in Fairview, Illinois, (Metro St. Louis) was plateaued in the 1990s. Pastor Shane Bishop believed something changed in 2001. The church relocated in the late ’90s but in 2001 the church “just took off.” People at Christ Church embraced a deeper practice of prayer. Currently one of the prayer teams gathers on Sunday mornings before church. The team walks through every area in the church facilities where activities will take place. They pray for the pastors and the worship leaders. “For me,” Pastor Bishop said, “prayer is absolutely foundational.” He continued, “Prayer plants dynamite, and evangelism detonates the dynamite. If you don’t have the dynamite planted, there’s nothing to detonate. So prayer, I believe, is absolutely essential.”

As we wrote in chapter 2, any of the transformational practices can be the place where a church experiences breakthrough. Prayer, however, seemed to permeate all of the scenarios we studied. TCs were consistently places where prayer played a role in all they did. Whether engaging in their specific mission assigned by God or connecting through intentional relationships, prayer was vital to witnessing spiritual breakthroughs.

2. *Praying churches have praying leaders.* The principle of modeling is a recurring theme in TCs. Whether engaging the community, embracing relationships with lost people, or praying, pastors of TCs embody the

practices embraced by the New Testament church. Their first calling is to live like Christ. Their second calling is to equip the saints through being an Ephesians 4 pastor-teacher.

Pastor Travis Adams of Mountain Presbyterian Church in Blairsville, Georgia, prays for people in his congregation every day using a church directory. Pastor Wayne Jenkins of South Run Baptist Church of Springfield, Virginia, “practices what he preaches” in personal prayer. He said, “Ever since I got here, I wanted South Run to be more of a prayerful church. The only way that was going to happen is if I became more prayerful too.” Pastor Jenkins has morning, noon, and evening prayer times. In addition to personal worship during these times, he prays for the congregation by name. He also prays over the pews and through Sunday School rooms.

3. *Praying churches commonly experience answers to prayer.* Prayer environments are marked by God’s intervention. Stories of answered prayer are celebrated. God is glorified when answers to prayer are undeniable. Transformational leaders know stories are critical to fuel prayer movements in their churches.

Pastor John Lawrence of Lake United Methodist Church in Chippewa Lake, Ohio, said, “It starts with me. . . . I often speak of amazing answers and power that I have experienced in prayer.” Pastor Thomas Wright of Memorial Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio, believes the stories of answered prayer are critical to the establishment of a strong praying environment. One of the most exciting things for Pastor Wright is to see the fruit of praying. He said the stories do not have to be big, but they are significant when people hear what God is doing in response to praying. “To me,” Pastor Wright said, “fruit from prayer is just great.”

Unfortunately many believers pray without any substantive belief, as if we believe more in the tacked-on “if it be thy will” caveat than in the God

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to whom we pray. TCs pray because they believe it matters that they pray. For your church to become a Transformational Church, it must believe that God answers the prayers of His people.

4. Praying churches pray for members by name. TCs have great confidence in their ability to make a difference in the lives of others by praying for them. Paul demonstrated a life committed to praying for other believers. He told the Ephesian Christians, “This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:15–16)

Macedonia United Methodist Church in Alpharetta, Georgia, practices praying for attendees by name. Pastor Sam Newman called prayer “the most important facet of our church, period.” Pastor Newman stated the

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value, and the church has demonstrated the behavior to verify the value. Every Sunday at noon people gather at this church to “pray the pews.” A designated person gathers the registration pad from each pew. Every person who attends services signs the pew register. The pads are placed on the altar. People join together there,

kneel, and pray for each person who signed the register. Pastor Newman believes the public prayer experience for his people is critical to their personal growth in praying. “We try to make the focal point of prayer to be like tasting honey . . . tasting a relationship with God.”

Mountain Presbyterian Church in Blairsville, Georgia, has prayer chains and prayer groups like most churches. However, they have a unique system to pray for their membership. Every year all members are randomly assigned to other members and informed of their assignments. They are asked to pray every day on behalf of the person to whom they are assigned. Members often send cards reminding others of their commitment to pray for them.

5. Praying churches have systems and processes. Most of the examples of praying in churches are tied into something tangible that keeps prayer happening. Prayer as with most priorities in a local church rarely happens all by itself. People will never grow deeper in prayer unless something is

consistently placed in front of them to teach and remind. Resources and support systems are important parts of prayer in TCs. People are always learning how to pray and, thus, go deeper in prayer. New believers are often taught the basics of prayer in discipleship classes. But no question, people learn to pray by praying. Churches offer people simple systems to help them engage prayer on a more frequent and deeper level.

Macedonia United Methodist Church has a prayer system started by a woman in their church. Forty-five families are ready to pray in an instant through e-mail contact. Pastor Newman notifies the leader who will have people praying within fifteen minutes of his contact.

Trinity Church of God in Columbus, Ohio, has a visual system to help people practice and request prayer. Pastor Kenneth King has a preservice prayer area. Pastor King had the church take a visual overflow area to create an “upper room.” A large wall hanging is included where people can attach prayer requests. People spend time at the “wall of prayer” praying in the upper room. Prayer inserts are in the weekly bulletin at Trinity. Requests are on one side of the insert. On the other side is a daily prayer chart asking them to pray for something different each day. The prayer guides are redistributed for the midweek meeting and used to guide corporate prayer times.

Pastor Wayne Jenkins of South Run Baptist Church in Springfield, Virginia, came back from sabbatical with a new commitment to prayer. Disappointment in his people’s interest in prayer inspired more intentional approaches to help them grow. He started a daily prayer blog that included Scripture and prayer for every day. His desire for his people is to “draw them to prayer and worship wherever they are.”

Though prayer occurs spontaneously throughout a TC, having a process for its growth and expansion is seen as important for making disciples. The difference between a TC and other churches is that the process to encourage prayer is subservient to prayer itself. Churches that have not yet made it to a transformational level often allow the program intended to encourage prayerfulness to become the priority over prayer itself. A classic example is the traditional Wednesday night prayer meeting. In the vast

majority of these meetings, the hour-long service is dominated by reading a prayer request list and Bible teaching from the pastor. Both of those activities are important but normally the least amount of time of the service is given to actual prayer. And then it is normally voiced by the pastor or another key leader.

TCs have developed programs that encourage all believers to learn more about prayer and to pray with greater frequency. Rather than relying on the professional clergy of the church, in a TC the members find great satisfaction in becoming personally active in prayer.

6. *Praying churches value corporate prayer.* Prayer is about a relationship in Transformational Churches. Many pastors in our research consistently taught from the pulpit about prayer and praying. Also, they clarified that prayer was not a religious duty but a relationship born out of love for God. They clarified the multiple aspects of prayer beyond intercession.

Pastor Thomas Wright has taught his membership in Columbus, Ohio, to learn to accept the fact that sometimes their prayers are not answered the way they prefer. "One of the phrases our people use around here is, 'it's not about us; it's about Him.'"

Lake United Methodist Church in Chippewa Lake, Ohio, places a high value on public prayer. Pastor John Lawrence describes their public prayer as "honest" and "powerful." "We stress that in our church these are holy moments when we pray together as a congregation . . . almost as if we are standing in awe of God whose presence we are in." Pastor Lawrence further described the powerful statement affirmed as they pray together, "We are acknowledging corporately as a family of God . . . we have experienced great answers to prayer in the past, and we expect to see those answers again this time and future times."

TCs desire to witness God's move to transform the entire community around them. They hope to see Him change everyone who attends the church. Because they hope for so much from God, they are eager to pray about it together. Relational intentionality converged with prayerful dependence again and again throughout our study.

Transformational Churches want to pray together. Praying together is consistent with a deep desire to see lives and their community transformed by the power of Christ. They enjoy the community interaction with God. They grow close to one another through hearing the church petition for God's work together. Churches that pray together see God's work together.

7. *Praying churches engage their communities through prayer.* As we wrote earlier, prayer is a response to God's character and heart. Churches that regularly display their dependence on God through prayer are more likely to act according to His heart and join Him in His work. Prayerfulness should lead to a greater desire to act. If it does not, then you are doing it wrong.

Pastor Rob Watts leads the membership of West Columbus Church of God in Columbus, Ohio, to engage neighborhoods through prayer. He recently led them to take nine-volt batteries door-to-door offering to change out the batteries in their neighbor's smoke detectors. As they left, they asked their neighbors if they had anything they could pray about. They reach out to their community one Sunday a month and asked each person contacted for prayer requests.

First Baptist Church of Carrizo Springs, Texas, engages their community through prayer walking. Pastor Robert Krause personally leads his church to prayer walk neighborhoods. By doing so, they have numerous conversations with people who are curious about what they are doing.

Pastor Mark Britton of Hitchcock United Methodist Church in Hitchcock, South Dakota, meets each Saturday night with what he calls, "a community of the faithful." The prayer meeting includes people from his church and other churches in the community. The purpose of the meeting is to pray for community needs. The meeting has been going on for over a year. Pastor Britton believes the prayer meeting has been used of God for many purposes. People have experienced the power of God and seen amazing answers to prayer since the beginning of the community of the

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faithful. Pastor Britton said when people in the community know they are being prayed for by “the community of the faithful” it brings joy to them, which he believes aids the healing process in peoples’ lives.

David Garrison captured the desperation of God’s people that moves them to pray for their communities:

We pray because our vision exceeds our abilities. Prayer is the soul’s deepest cry of rebellion against the way things are, seeing the lost of the world and crying out, ‘This does not glorify God, and so, by God’s grace, it must change!’ Prayer comes from God and ascends back to God on behalf of those who do not know God.⁵

Prayer in the TCs follows the passion of churches for people in the harvest. Consistent with Jesus’ heart for the harvest, the focus of prayer is not only for the sick or the members of a church but for the people who have yet to know Him.

8. *Praying churches have big prayer events.* Transformational Churches practice ongoing prayer gatherings and other prayer processes. Prayer also includes “big event” venues. Vaughn Forest Baptist Church celebrated their fifteenth anniversary celebration with a prayer event. Each year they have the same event that dedicates a day of praying for each year the church has been in existence. More than six hundred people prayed for at least an hour for fifteen days. One of the valuable by-products of the event is that new attendees see a vivid demonstration of how important prayer is to the life of the church. Numbers are not necessarily the only scorecard for success, but Pastor Phipps believes they gauge the spiritual passion of his people.

Concord is a city of around sixty-six thousand people in northeast Charlotte, North Carolina. Prayer is a transformational practice for Pastor Leon Hawks and his three-year-old congregation. Sunday morning gatherings are highlighted by conversational prayers with specific purposes such as praise and petition prayer times. An “Embrace Prayer” box is located outside the worship center to provide an ongoing link between prayer and the needs of attendees.

Crosspointe is a prayer-walking and a prayer-driven church. “We do a lot of prayer walking here,” said Pastor Hawks. From prayer walking over their new church property to “windshield tour” praying through their community, prayer has moved from a philosophy of ministry to a practice. “We’ll go to lunch sometimes, and a community will come to mind that we have not reached. It’s nothing unusual for us to go and park at the entrance and pray for the community,” Pastor Hawks said. All-day prayer meetings take place twice a year at Crosspointe. The twelve hour prayer meetings begin at 6:00 a.m. Rooms in the church building are set up as prayer stations based on distinct needs. Participants move from room to room to invest a focused time of intercession based on each need. Prayer is the *engine* of Transformational Churches.

Prayer Environments in Transformational Churches

Prayer sounds like the Christian thing to do. Prayer is always the right answer to most questions that present a problem to be solved. But how many Christians and churches really pray? Our research supported the significance of a church that not only valued prayer but practiced prayer. When you find those churches, you will find Transformational Churches.

How did those churches get to the point of really praying? In those churches prayer was valued and practiced to the point of gaining momentum from God. Once people started experiencing the power and presence of God through prayer, more people started to catch on. Notice what our research revealed.

Our research supported the significance of a church that not only valued prayer but practiced prayer.

- “Attending my church causes me to want to pray more in my personal life.” (83 percent of TC members strongly or moderately agree)

Churches that cultivate environments that motivate people to pray could never do that through manipulation or expectations. Church environments that cause people to pray consistently experience answers to prayer and practice praying.

Prayer leaders agree that we are missing our most significant resource when we neglect the spiritual discipline of prayer. We live in an age where we have so many other methods or activities to resort to besides prayer. We need prophetic voices to embrace the need of calling the church to prayer. Our pulpits have been multiplied through technology. Not only should

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the message be sent from our Sunday morning messengers but from our Web sites, books, and blogs. Our only hope is divine intervention, not our latest revitalization tool or church-planting strategies. Where people pray, God works. Where God works, transformation happens.

Leonard Ravenhill was born in England in 1907. He influenced many great leaders and churches through his writing, teaching, and preaching. His prophetic voice cried out for revival and spoke against prayerlessness. As we continue to be overwhelmed by lostness in North America and desperate for answers, we need more voices calling for prayer. Here is what Ravenhill said in his most famous book first published in 1959:

Poverty-stricken as the church is today in many things, she is the most stricken here, in the place of prayer. We have many organizers, but few agonizers; many players and payers, few prayers; many singers, few clingers; lots of pastors, few wrestlers; many fears, few tears; much fashion, little passion; many interferers, few intercessors; many writers, but few fighters. Failing here, we fail everywhere.⁶

“Failing here we fail everywhere.” We see little evidence that many of us believe that . . . yet. But when we run out of other options, we will. We hope it is not too late . . . then. Transformational Churches are already there.

Transformational Churches have a missionary mentality (Discern). They emphasize the three key values of vibrant leadership, relational intentionality, and prayerful dependence (Embrace). In the next three chapters we will see three primary manifestations of transformation in the part of the loop called Engage. The first of these is the experience of true worship, the subject of our next chapter.