



Sermon Series Praying Our Way to Pentecost

Mobilize : Hearts

Opening video-

Opening illustration: Have you ever tried to work together with someone who didn't have their heart in it?

It's like the times when I find myself grocery shopping with my wife. I like being with my wife, but I don't like grocery shopping!

She usually shops by herself, but there are those occasional times when I'm with her, and she needs to "stop and get a few things."

The next thing I know, she is reminded of a few more things that she needs "while we are here."

Meanwhile, I am mindlessly scooting along, pushing the grocery cart, and trying to entertain myself with my phone, hoping the battery doesn't die.

My heart is NOT in grocery shopping.

You know that feeling. You are there. You're present. But your heart is not in it.

Have you ever felt that way in Church. You are present for a worship service, but your heart isn't in it?

I've been there. We probably all have.

No matter how gifted the worship leader and engaging the preacher, sometimes our hearts drift to somewhere else.

(Poll - share a funny poll of the church board or staff about the top 5 things they get distracted thinking about during a church service.)

Could you relate to any of these distractions?

There are so many concerns, some silly, some really important, that can distract our heart from being engaged with God.

Sometimes we are present, but not really present.

One of my personal pet peives, and maybe you share it, is trying to have a conversation with someone who can't seem to look up from their phone.

Maybe they are grunting out a response to half-heartedly oblige my presence, but they certainly aren't engaged.

Do you like to be around someone who is present, but their heart is not in it? Probably not.

It makes you feel ignored, unappreciated, and disrespected.

No one wants to be around someone who treats them like that.

Let's pause right there. Hold that thought.

Let me ask you a question about God.

Do you think God enjoys spending time with **us** when **we** have that kind of mindset?

God knows when we come to Him with that feeling.

When our hearts are wandering and drifting, and He actually reveals in the Bible that He doesn't like it either.

We may be able to conceal our drifting hearts from others, but we can't hide it from God.

In the Old Testament book of Isaiah, the prophet wrote, ***“The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.” (Isaiah 29:13, NIV).***

Wow, what a commentary!

God doesn't want us to just go through the motions or to offer up worship that is disconnected and passionless.

God wants our hearts.

We know this must be a really important truth because, during Jesus' earthly ministry, He repeated this same passage from Isaiah,

“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Matthew 15:8, NIV).

Jesus knew that their hearts were not “in it.” He knew what others were thinking.

Luke records the fact that ***“Jesus knew their thoughts” (Luke 11:17 NIV).***

No doubt, Jesus peers deep into our souls as well and knows what is really going on inside each one of us.

The apostle Paul reminds us that the Spirit of God ***“searches our hearts” (Romans 8:27, NIV).*** He knows if our heart is “in it” or not.

So, with all this in mind, what should we do when we begin to notice that our hearts are losing intensity and wandering off?

The Bible tells us that prayer is what draws our hearts back to God.

Our knees engage our hearts to connect to the heart of God.

If you find your heart is not “in it,” then it’s time for some “knee-action” – humbling ourselves before God in prayer.

That’s what we have been learning through this prayer journey.

Our knees are connected to our hearts.

That’s why God wants us to pray because He wants to be closely connected to our hearts.

He wants to become our focus, so we can follow Him with our whole heart!

He doesn’t just want you to just be present. He doesn’t want you to just “go through the motions.”

God wants you to put your heart into your relationship with Him.

As we engage in sincere prayer, we will find that our hearts get connected to God.

Connecting to God’s heart begins to transform OUR heart.

That’s the way prayer works.

Prayer is heart work.

Pentecost: That’s why Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem UNTIL they received the gift of the Spirit.

Before they jumped into the good work God had for them, their hearts had to be connected to His and transformed in that sacred space.

Their hearts had to be in it if they were every going to enjoy and accomplish the transformative Kingdom work that God was preparing them for.

The Holy Spirit descended on the group as they were assembled in the Upper Room of Jerusalem.

The power of the church was born that day in a prayer gathering.

If we want the Holy Spirit to come in His transforming power, we need to gather in prayer and ask for His presence to fill us.

Once the disciples humbled themselves through the knee-action of prayer, they connected with the heart of God and experienced a transformation (Acts 1:8).

This power of the Spirit transformed the disciple's hearts and empowered their speech.

Two key things radically changed in that moment:

1. They were transformed from fearful/hiding disciples to bold/speaking disciples.

After Jesus was crucified and buried, the disciples were afraid and secretly huddled together in a secure location.

John 20:19 records, "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews."

I don't think we often understand the gravity the disciples felt in those days following the crucifixion.

The religious leaders they had spent their lives looking up to, and some were even related to, just hunted down and murdered their best friend and spiritual leader.

Their entire vision for what their future and the future of their nation would look like was wrapped up in who they thought Jesus would be as a deliverer and conquerer.

Yet they just watched the same old powers of the religious elite and the Roman Government destroy everything.

The disciples were afraid. Hiding in fear that they would be the next target for political assassination.

They were afraid. Convinced that years of their lives had been wasted and that there was no possible future for them.

And somehow, beyond their wildest understanding, Jesus had been raised from the dead and promised that He wasn't through with them.

That scared them too. In order to move forward they would have to face all of those fears and trust in a leader who wasn't physically present with them anymore.

They were deeply afraid.

Yet on the day of Pentecost, after the 120 disciples had spent 10 days waiting in prayer for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, the powerful presence of God burst into the room!

The disciples emerged from the Upper Room with great boldness, proclaiming the mighty acts of God to the very people they once feared!

What happened?

What changed them from fearful/hiding disciples to bold/speaking disciples?

It was the transformation of their hearts by the Holy Spirit!

That morning, the disciples flooded out of the Upper Room and spoke the glories of God boldly in languages they had never learned.

This was the beginning of the movement of God across the world as He mobilized His Church to achieve His mission.

It was a miracle of communication!

But there was another miracle that was not as visible as the gift of languages and the boldness of speech.

That second transformational work was a purification of their hearts.

2. Their hearts were purified from the sin of self-centeredness.

Prior to this miracle, Jesus' disciples were often caught in power-hungry arguments with one another about who was the greatest.

Jesus had rebuked them a number of times for their argumentative hearts.

“Jesus called them together and said, **“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”**” (Matthew 20:25–28, NIV).

The disciple's hearts were carnal, self-centered, self-seeking, and self-promoting.

However, when the Spirit of God fell on them and filled them on the Day of Pentecost, a radical heart transformation occurred.

They were baptized with the Holy Spirit, and as a result of that baptism, God purified their hearts from that corrupting ambition and cleansed their hearts from the disease of self-centeredness.

What an incredibly powerful and hope-filled truth:

God has the power to free our hearts from being self-centered, self-seeking, and self-promoting to God-centered and others-focused.

That's what happened in Acts chapter 2.

Now, let's fast forward in time from Day of Pentecost to Acts chapter 15. There we find Peter reflecting back on the Day of Pentecost.

He was reporting to the council of Elders in Jerusalem about how this same experience that the Jews had on the Day of Pentecost was also being experienced by the Gentiles.

Prior to that, the Spirit was only given to Jewish believers – those in the family line of Abraham.

God had promised Abraham in ***Genesis 17:7, "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."***

The Jewish people expected God to come to them, but not to the Gentiles.

Gentiles were outside the promise.

But Jews often neglected the rest of God's promise to Abraham found in Genesis 22:18,

"...through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Something new was happening! The rest of God's promise was coming true!

Peter was seeing the same Spirit that changed his heart being given to both Jews and Gentiles.

The Jewish community saw this as scandalous!

Yet, it was the fulfillment of what Jesus told them would happen.

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

What Jesus said was now coming true!

So the Elders of the church at Jerusalem called Peter in to give an account of this new phenomenon.

As Peter was speaking to them, he first reflected back on the day of Pentecost.

He, no doubt, remembered all that happened that day: the mighty wind, the fire that touched their heads, the bold and powerful languages that were spoken.

But none of those signs were mentioned in this reflection.

Peter reflected back on ONE reality of this baptism with the Holy Spirit, which proved to be a lasting effect.

Let’s read about that in Acts 15,

“God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8–9, NIV).

Peter didn’t focus on the signs and wonders and gifts that happened on that day, as wonderful as they were, but rather what he emphasized was the purification of their hearts.

Heart transformation was the most memorable and lasting effect of Pentecost.

Today, we need that same heart-cleansing work of the Holy Spirit.

To fully surrender our hearts to connect with God...

To fully embrace the calling and purpose God has placed on our lives...

To fully see the needs around us and where we are called to lend a hand...

We need an outpouring on our hearts of the Holy Spirit.

We need the cleansing of our self-centered, self-seeking, self-promoting heart, so we can connect to God's heart and fulfill His mission!

I want to leave you with one more caution to safeguard the gift God has given you.

Even after this cleansing experience, that triple threat of self-centeredness, self-seeking, and self-promotion can subtly creep back into our hearts if we lose our focus.

That's why we need this prayer emphasis.

We know our hearts can wander away from the heart of God, and our passion can recede.

We can easily lose focus.

That's why we need to get back on our knees and ask for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit!

We need an awakening!

How differently might the world look tomorrow if today, half a million Nazarenes around the world connected fully to the heart of God and were cleansed from their self-centered, self-seeking, and self-promoting inclinations?

How many more people would see the love of Jesus in action?

How many more people would experience the heart of God themselves?

Ask yourself, “Do I need a fresh infilling of the purifying power of the Holy Spirit?”

Have I allowed self-centeredness to creep back into focus?

Do I need to reengage with the heart of God?

The right answer to Jesus is always, Yes!

Today would be a great day to bow your **knees and engage your heart with the heart of God!**

Prayer

Response

Invite people to pray. Ask them to surrender their self-seeking, self-centered, and self-promoting desires at the feet of Jesus to have their hearts transformed by the Holy Spirit, enabling them to connect to the heart of God.

Discipleship Opportunity: Use the prayer journal to record how God is transforming your heart as you connect to His through your time in prayer.

Take Away: Will you spend the necessary time in prayer for the Spirit to fill and transform your heart?