

## *Priming the Pump*

### **Isaiah 55**

John Breon

This past week, we as a congregation began something exciting. We started a six-week study called *Transformed Living*, and we read the first seven chapters of a book called *Treasures of the Transformed Life*. If you've been out of town and don't know about this church-wide study, or if you know about it but didn't have a chance to start, I want to encourage you that it isn't too late. Please join us in reading this book. Please participate in the Sunday school or other small group discussion about its topics. You have time to catch up. We want you in this study. We want all of us on the same page, learning and discussing the same material. You'll have insights on these treasures that no one else will have, and we need those unique insights. So if you haven't picked up a copy of the book and the small group participant's workbook, stop by the table at one of the entrances. And jump in.

Now some of you may be wondering why we're making such a big deal about having the entire congregation involved in this study. The reason is that *Transformed Living* presents prayer, presence, gifts, service, and commitment as true treasures that help us move on in the Kingdom of God. In the vows of membership in the United Methodist Church we promise to participate faithfully in the church's ministries through our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. This program we're using was published before witness was added to the vows, but we'll be sure to include it as we go along. I want to participate like that and I want everyone who's part of First UMC to participate in these ways.

Even though we're exploring UM vows of membership, they're really spiritual disciplines for all Christians. These practices are basic to being disciples, followers, apprentices of Jesus.

This first week of the study was called "Priming the Pump." You remember the illustration: old-fashioned pumps first needed some water poured in to prime them before they could reach down deep and provide the water supply. That's what this first week of the study has been—

priming the pump, preparing, getting ready. We've looked at where we are now, evaluated where we'd like to be, and even questioned some of our basic beliefs about our relationship with God. All of this is to help us acknowledge where we are now and prepare to commit to the study and to what we might learn in the course of it. Today I want to suggest four things for us all to consider as we move through this study.

This study meets each of us right where we are, right now, in our walk with Christ. *So the first point is that the study allows us to take a fresh look at where we are now.* We have all kinds of people in this church and we're all in different seasons of our life in Christ.

Can you recall a time when you were really thirsty or hungry? Maybe after a workout or a hard day's work in the heat. I remember one time when I was in little league baseball. We had a game out of town. It was a hot, dry, summer evening. I was thirsty and hungry. After the game, Dad drove me home. For some reason, we didn't get anything from the concession stand. I anticipated getting home and having something good to eat and drink. When we got home, I went to make a sandwich—and the bread was moldy. I guess my parents hadn't been to the store for a while. There wasn't bread for a sandwich and all that was in the refrigerator to drink was some grape juice. This may not be exactly right, but it's how I remember it. It was disappointing to expect something to satisfy hunger and thirst and it wasn't there.

When you're spiritually hungry and thirsty, you want to go to the source of living water and the bread of life. So often we look for satisfaction in things that are empty, dry, moldy.

In Isaiah 55, God offers this invitation:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. (1-3)

Some of us are thirsty for more, and we know we're thirsty. We know God has more for us than we're experiencing or suffering through right now. We want that deep refreshing drink that will satisfy every need and every cell crying out for more.

Others of us are walking hand in hand with the Lord and know how to return to him again and again for the living water that refreshes us. You may be thinking, "I don't know. My spiritual life's really good. I can't imagine it can get much better than this." Here's some exciting news: it can. God always has something more for us.

Some of us are moving so fast with family, work, and activities that we don't even know we're thirsty. We think we're okay and can't imagine how on earth we could find the time to stop for a cool refreshing drink. I mean, we might get one if we can get it at the drive-thru and drink it on the way, but to consider adding one more component to our life—well, when we're in that spot, we're so dry we don't actually know how desperate for water we really are.

But one thing we each have in common, no matter what our level of thirst at the present time, is that we all really want more. Some of us might not think of it that way or realize we want more, but we do. We aren't really satisfied. There's something inside of each of us that wonders if there's more to life than we have; if it's possible to be happier, more fulfilled, more content, more satisfied.

Do you remember that quote from John D. Rockefeller at the start of the *Treasures of the Transformed Life* book? Rockefeller was heir to the greatest fortune in the world back in the 1920s. Among their enterprises, the Rockefellers owned Standard Oil, which controlled almost all the oil industry in America at the time. Most of today's big oil companies were part of Standard Oil. Recent estimates of Rockefeller's net worth placed it at \$995 million in 1928, which would be about \$6.5 billion in our time. Well anyway, John D. Rockefeller was once asked how much money was enough. His reply was, "Just a little bit more."

Even one of the richest men in the world said that regardless of what we have, we want more. Now he was talking about money, and we do need to be wise with money. Luke 16:11 says, "So if you have not been

trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" But Rockefeller's statement also applies to other aspects of our lives. Money is just a little thing when compared to true riches. Money doesn't make people happy; money won't ever satisfy. God offers us the true riches of life—and among them is the gift of his love and caring for us. *That's the second point to consider: God really loves and cares for us.*

Do you know how much God cares for us? He cares so much that he offers the very best of life for us. Like Rockefeller, as a society, we tend to think that if we could just get a little more money, we'd be happy. But the true riches of life go far beyond that. Someone has said that "in today's society we know the price of everything, but the value of very little." Value is what's important. What's true? What's lasting?

Deep down, we know that we want what's true and lasting. It's what we want in our relationships with our spouses, our children, our life's work. It's okay to want what's true and lasting, to want more and not want to settle for less than you were created for. God created us with a thirst to be more. He created us to want more, to want a rich life, one of more meaning and more fulfillment. And the good news is that when we seek God, we get those things we long for—and more.

As we begin this study, we might not know what that "MORE" is for us. We know we want it, but don't have an idea what IT is. That's okay. One thing I believe we'll all gain from this study is that we'll discover new aspects of who and what really satisfies our souls. God has a plan and a purpose for creation, for humanity, for each of us. Part of what we'll do in this series is explore for what—and for whom—we've been created.

*The third point is this: you'll discover your niche.* There's a place where you fit perfectly into the niche that God has created for you, and where everything you have or do works together to accomplish his desires for you. You may be called on to use your time, money, talent, knowledge, or even relationships. God has given us all these, and he wants us to use them in order that he might be glorified.

God's desire is to show us what's best. This entire study involves discovering the best that God has for us in a life of transformed living. He wants us to jump into the water and enjoy it in all of its fullness. This can't

happen if we have divided loyalties. We must have a central focus. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God." The top of our priority list should be commitment to the kingdom of God. Isaiah says, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near." When we choose God, other choices will begin to take their rightful place.

Now I know for those of us who are pastors, this is our life, this is what we do. Not everyone is as engulfed in the life of the church as we are. And yet, one of the main points of the *Transformed Living* study is that ministry shouldn't be left up to the clergy or church staff. Every person in the body of Christ is called to have the kingdom of God as his or her whole life. Every person in the body of Christ is called to be a minister—especially those who don't have that title on their business cards. Or especially if they don't even have business cards. You minister to people by the way you live your life, by the way you talk to the person in line next to you at the grocery store, by little kindnesses you do like bringing in the mail for your elderly neighbor, or by volunteering in areas of service in this church and our community. We recognize that the kingdom of God isn't just about service. It's all about that relationship we talked about earlier. When you love someone, you become like them. You want to do the things you see them do. Jesus said he only did what he saw the Father doing. "Whatever the Father does, the Son also does" (John 5:19).

Jesus lets us have a relationship with God like his. It's amazing that the creator of the universe wants to be our friend. He wants to spend time with us. He wants to talk with us, and he listens to what we have to say. That's mind-blowing, but it's true. God created us to be in relationship with him. That relationship takes many forms. It develops in prayer, it expands when we participate in worship, it deepens when we give, and it grows when we reach out to others in need. And like all intense, satisfying relationships, it requires commitment.

That's *the fourth point to consider: it's time to commit*. God's already made his commitment to us. Now, as we walk through this six-week study, we have the opportunity to commit—or in some cases—recommit to our relationship with him and to learn of treasures that lead to transformed living.

I've talked a lot today about what we're going to learn in this study and how it's going to help each of us satisfy our thirst for that something more that's missing. I hope you're as excited by this study as I am, and that you're ready to commit to reading the book, reflecting on what you read, and participating in the small group meetings.

There's that word again: commitment. It's an important word and concept, and you're going to hear about it more in the coming weeks. Commitment primes the pump, bringing the water of life. Once primed, the pump will flow endlessly as long as it keeps moving. To keep ourselves moving in the right direction, we'll soon be looking at our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness—beginning the fulfilled life that God has for us.

A pastor in Africa who possessed contagious faith wrote these words about commitment that speak straight to the heart:

I'm part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I've stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I'm a disciple of his.

I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure.

I'm finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap giving, and dwarf goals. I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded.

I now live by faith, lean on his presence, walk by his patience, lift by his prayer and labor by his almighty power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions are few, my Guide is reliable, my mission is clear.

I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed.

I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I've stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up and preached up for the cause of Christ.

I'm a disciple of Jesus. I must go until he comes, give until I drop, preach until all know and work until He stops me. And, when he comes for his own, he will have no problem recognizing me, my banner will be clear.

(Bob Moorhead, 5/17/08,  
<<http://www.valdosta.edu/~kbennett/mycommitment.html>>)

Commitment is when our banner is clear; it involves knowing whose team we're on. Commitment primes the pump for receiving the water of life that God has prepared for us. My prayer is that each of us will commit to the journey through this study and receive all that God has committed for us.